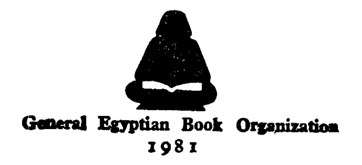
THE ORIGINS OF ARABIC THEATE

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to you
to the soul which never left me
to the pure soul which stood near me
to the soul which enlightened my road
to the soul of my brother

Kamal al-Din

INTRODUCTION

Theater as it is known in the west emerged in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1847, then in Egypt in 1870, but until 1898 there was no artistic criticism. Although studies of theater started appearing after 1898, the serious artistic studies started only after the emergence of Arabic poetic theater in 1926. When Tawfîq al-Hakîm wrote his play *Ahl al Kahf* (The Cave Men), the theater and its criticism entered a new era. Up to this time what was written about theater was scattered in newspapers and magazines. Until Cairo University took Arabic theater seriously and gave its first master's degree (1947) to Mahmùd Shawkat, who studied Shawqi's poetic plays, there was no academic study of theater. Then the first Ph. D. was given in 1955 to Muhammad Yùsuf Najm, whose dissertation *The Drama in Modern Arabic Literature, 1847-1917* was published in 1956. In 1963, Shawkat's book *Theatrical Art in Modern Arabic Literature,* part of his Ph. D. disserta-

tion, was also published. Then Jacob M. Landau published in English his book, *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema,* in 1969. At that time Mandûr's articles were appearing in several magazines and newspapers. Thus many studies of theater began to appear, and the authors were also trying to do something.

Twenty years ago when I started to explore this field, many people smiled mockingly when they heard about the nature of my research : « Studying Arabic theater ? Is there any ? » The thought was that exploring this field would be like exploring a desert. In fact, it was not a desert ; it was a jungle. There was a lot to find, but the difficulty was how and where to find it, since there are no records about the companies, many of the plays are lost, and there are few autobiographies. The more the light was turned on, the more the darkness appeared clearly. My studies led me to many fields other than theater, to history, anthropology, sociology--in short, to all cultural aspects of Islamic civilization.

The problems were many and had to be explored one by one. Some of them I could solve, some of them I could try to solve, and some of them I will leave for other scholars to deal with. I tried to solve these problems without fear of failure. In fact, a lot of courage was needed to solve the problems, if indeed they could be solved. In my book *Arabs and the Art of Theater* (published in Arabic, 1975), I concluded that the Western theater emerged in the Arab world not only through

Western but also through Arab tradition and through the circumstances within the Arab world, which was ready to receive theater. After this study I was interested in making this result more clear, and that interest led me to the study of the origins of Arabic theater.

I benefited also from my previous studies. I also found it important to use some of my previous work, but with a new focus. My research in the origin of Arabic theater found it framed within two important factors, one interior and one exterior. The interior factor is the Arab folk heritage and Islamic civilization, both strong influences on the shaping of the emerging Arabic theater. The exterior factro is the influence of the west : the student mission in Europe, the European theatrical companies in Egypt, and Shakespeare. This book thus contains only four chapters, one studying Islam and Islamic civilization, and the other three studying the outside influences. This book does not include the Arabic folk heritage ; that will be a separate study to be completed later.

The first chapter presents a study of the role of Islam and Islamic civilization as a factor in the emerging Arabic theater. The role of Islam is very controversial ; in fact, much debate has arisen on why Muslims did not produce any theatrical art before the nineteenth century. Scholars researching the subject have reached very different conclusions, only a few of which are relevant to this chapter.

Islam had definite views about certain things ; for example, wine, gambling, adultery, and pork were clearly prohibited. However, the view of Islam toward painting, sculpting, and drawing is a matter of dispute among the jurists. Some scholars believe that Islam completely prohibited the figurative arts. Others believe that Islam only prohibited these arts from being part of its ritual.

Fabion Bowers states that :

> In Islam, according to the tenets of the Koran, representational arts are disavowed, and dance and drama suffered accordingly. If art depicted God or was used as part of religious worship the Muslim regarded it as blasphemy (1).

A. Metin states that « Islamic religion was antagonistic to theater and dance » (2). Professor George Jacob points out the lack of any true drama, or indeed of anything truly creative in the art of Arab countries, and ascribes this lack to the influence of Islam on the inhabitants of the region (3). 'Ahmed 'Amin agrees with those who believe Islam completely prohibited the figurative arts. 'Amin felt that since Islam prohibited painting, a figurative art, by analogy Islam also prohibited theater, another figurative art. But 'Amin, and

(1) Fabion Bowers, The Theater in the East (New York : Grove Press, 1969), pp. 6-7.

(2) A. Metin, A History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey (Ankara : Forum, 1963-64), p. 11.

(3) Ibid.

those with whom he agreed, did not examine the rudimentary theatrical expression known in Islamic society. These critics did not examine, first, whether Islamic society occepied theater, nor whether the jurisprudensc stood againts it ; second, how Muslims received the art of modern theater, which is strongly related to western theatrical art ; and third, how Muslims both reacted and related to the idea of conflict in western theater.

The second chapter, « The Student Educational Mission to Europe, » studies the great influence on the origin of Egyptian theater of Egyptian students who studied in Europe and returned home.The chapter also discusses their role in the development of the social, political, and artistic aspects of Egyptian life in the period from 1834 to 1944, the year Egypt established the Institute of Theatrical Art. Student missions to Europe continued, but after 1944 students went for widened experience in a field they had already begun studying.

The third chapter is a study of European theatrical companies from 1870 to 1923, after which their importance decreased. These companies are traced historically, and their influence on the social and aesthetic spheres is analyzed in an attempt to elucidate their role in the ontogeny of the native Egyptian theater.

The fourth chapter analyzes the influence of Shakespeare. In Egypt romanticism came to the fore in the early part of the twentieth century, at the same time that Shakespeare's works came to be a very important part of the repertoire of the growing Egyptian

theater. This chapter, a study of the early translations of Shakespeare's works and of the critical essays on these plays in the Egyptian mass media, illuminates how the Egyptians perceived Shakespeare's work and how it influenced the growth and development of Egyptian theater.

To accomplish these goals I trace the development of the roles played by the four influences shaping Arabic theater in the major sources which mention them—autobiographies, biographies, and the Egyptian mass media—and I go also to the Islamic sources, history and interpretations of the Quran.

I would like to thank Miss Juanita Lewis for her patience in reading, correcting, and typing the manuscript and for her work in helping to put the book in its final form ; Dustin Cowell, Professor of Arabic, University of wisconsin-Madison, for his advice and for urging me to publish this book ; and all those who encouraged me to do the work, especially the members of the Philosophy and Religion Department at Appalachian State University, and the members of the Arabic Department at Cairo University and American research center in Cairo. Without their help this book could not have been completed.

Finally, owing to the Press' inability to print diacritical marks, I apologize to the reader for not distinguishing between certain letters of the Arabic alphabet.

Boone, North Carolina

CHAPTER 1

ISLAM

The rudimentary theatrical art of Islam took several different forms (i.e., *ta'azi, orta oiunu, qaraquz,* and *khàuàl al-zill).* The first one, ta'àzi, was connected with Islamic religion in some way.

The *ta'àzi,* or « Passion play, » was a part of Shi'at ritual performed during the feast day commemorating the death of al-Husayn. On the tenth of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar, it might be « presented in public or private places in the open air or under the roof of a tent » (1). It was developed from al-'Awràd, the recition of the Quran and of poetry eulogizing al-Husayn, and was read in Karbla'. Per-

(1) Ehsan Yar-Shatar, « Development of Persian Drama in the Context of Cultural Confrontation », in Iran : Continuity and Variety, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York : The Center for Near Eastern Studies and the Center for International Studies, 1971), p. 22.

formances including physical torture accompanied these recitations. Even though the ta'àzi was connected with the Shi'at rituals, no one from the Sunni rejected or opposed it. In fact, the Sunni Muslims in Pakistan also used to perform this ta'àzi in the same period to commemorate al-Husayn.

The 'Azerbajanian Turks, who are almost Sunni, also performed these *ta'àzi*. The Ottoman Turks,

> however, on such occasions as were warranted had maktels, poems describing some episodes from the martyrdom of Huseyin. The dramatic recitation of maktal-i Huseyin with an audience has the potentiality of dramatic development with mime action, symbolism and the emotional participation of the audience (2).

Furthermore, there is on mention that the shicat jurists opposed the *ta'àzi* until 1896 when a Persian king banned its performance. His injunction was not due to religious reasons ; rather, he was against the immoral deeds connected with ta'àzi. Muhsin al-Amîn an eminent Lebanese Shi'at, criticized the immoral deeds connected with 'Ashùra' but not the ta'àzi (3). Such criticisms, however, did not keep the Muslims in Persia and Iraq from performing the ta'àzi. These ta'àzi,

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(2) A. Metin, A History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey (Ankara : Forum, 1963-64), p. 13.

(3) Muhsin al-'Amîn, al Tanzîl (The Integrity), Beirut : Dàr al-Gnadìr, 1346 H.).

according to those scholars who considered them part of the heritage from pagan times, were more « like the performances of the priests of Baal than ghastly ceremonies of 'Ashura' or Rwz-qati» (4). Also, « it has been suggested that Husayn has been imbued with the attributes of some far more ancient prototypes like Adonis » (5).

In fact, there is no need to trace the *Taziya* to Baal or Adonis, for it originated in the belief of the *shi'at* in Husayn, which is related to the nature of the fertile land and consequently to the belief in the god of fertility, the death of the god, and the god's resurrection (6). Since the Muslim Shî'at were controlled by the Quran, they considered al-Husayn not God but only holy. The Muslims gave him a respect no less than the respect which the believers of Baal, Adonis, Osiris and Bacchus gave them, as a man who died to bring about the goodness of the people. This belief let the *ta'ziya live* until today in most of the countries which have a strong, active Shi'at community.

The second type of this theatrical expression is *orta oiunu.* Not as sacred as *ta'ziya,* it was a spectacle that « usually took place in a public square or in the

(4) E. G. Browne, A Literary History of Persia (Cambridge : University Press, 1969), p. 18.

(5) Ibid.

(6) See the detailed explanation of the relation between theater and gods of fertility in my book, al 'Arab wa fan al-Masrah (Arabs anp the Art of Theater), (Cairo : al Hay'ah al Misriyyah, 1975).

city environs, in the open air, and only rarely was arranged for an interior; the space required was too great » (7). The earliest historical mention of this art was in the twelfth century in Asia Minor during the reign of Saljuq (8). It enjoyed great popularity in the whole of Turkey and was also popular with the Ottoman sultans, of whom it was mentioned that

> a band of actors was attached to the sultan's retinue and accompanied him on his war campaigns. The players lived in their temporary military quarters, that they might be ready to distract the sultan after his difficult war feats (9).

It is known that religious men also accompanied the sultan, and one can assume that they too attended the theatrical performances. There was no denunciation of the actors or of their art because of religious laws, but there was political criticism. For its political hints and puns, « the theatre drew to itself the attention of the censorship which was very active in Turkey during the 19th century, especially toward its end, during the reign of 'Abdul Hamîd II. As a result many punishments and harsh measures were meted out to the theatre and the spectacles were often forbidden » (10).

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(7) Nicholas N. Marhnovitch, The Turkish Theater (New York : Theater Arts, Inc., 1933), p. 16.

(8) Ibid., p. 13.

(9) Ibid., p. 14.

(10) Marhnovitch, p. 15.

The third kind of theatrical expression, the *qaràqùz*, or puppet theater, has been known throughout the Islamic world since the 15th century. Most western scholars confused it with the shadow play, but it is in fact a completely different art. Its versatility allows it to adopt easily the different national characteristics of Turkey, North Africa, Egypt, and all the eastern Arabic countries. This folkloristic art enjoyed great popularity from the aristocrats down to the lowest stratum of society. It has never been hindered by any authorities, social, political, or religious. As a matter of fact, « the most pious men in Islam, called *dervishes*, were often *qaraquz* players » (11).

The fourth and last art, *khayàl al-zill*, the shadow play, was a well-known type of rudimentary theater. Opinions differ as to the origin of the *khayàl al-zill* Some argue that it began in India, others say China. whatever its origin, the shadow play was a most welcome theatrical art from in the Islamic world, where it took on different characteristics in different places.

The earliest historical mention of these plays, in the 6th century, has placed them and Islamic religion face to face without conflict or reservation. The report mentioned that Muzaffar al Dīn, the prince of 'Irbil for 549-630 H. (nearly 13th century), used to prepare every year for the celebration of al Mawlid, the birthday of the prophet Muhammad.

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(11) Marhnovitch, p. 37.

On the first of Safar, which is the second month of the lunar calender, they used to decorate the domes of the houses with all sorts of beautiful decorations. A group of singers and a group of shadow players also prepared for these circumstances. Every day, after the afternoon prayer, « al 'Asr, » Muzaffar al Din used to stand on one of the domes and hear the songs and look at the shadow plays and their appearance on the domes (12).

Another report also gave the shadow play legitimacy within Islamic jurisprudence. The sttory goes as follows : Sultàn Salàh al Din al 'Ayyùbi took out from the palace of Fatimiyyad the shadow players in order to show their art to his assistant al Qàdi al Fàdil. When the play started, al Qàdi al Fàdil tried to leave. The sultàn told him that if the play was prohibited by the law of Islam they didn't have to see it. Being a new employee, al Qàdi al Fàdil did not wish to annoy the sultàn, so he stayed until the curtain fell. After the performance, the sultàn asked for his opinion. Al Qadi Fàdil replied : « I saw great morals. I saw nations pass and others come. And when the cloth folded, it was exactly like folding the paper of a book » (13). His response—attaching « great morals » to the shadow play--is important, for it portrayed the shadow play as a social tool.

(12) Quoted from Ibràhîm Hamāda, Khayàl al Zill wa Tamthiliyyat b. Danyàl (The Shadow Plays and the Plays of b. Danyàl), Cairo: al Mu'assasah al Misriyya, 1961, p. 40.

(13) Quoted from 'Abd al-Hamid Yùnis, Khayal al Zill (Shadow Plays) Cairo : Al Dàr al Missriyya, August 1965, pp. 18-19.

'Ahmad Taymùr describes the shadow play as the main form of « entertainment at the court of the Fatimiyyad palace in Egypt » (14). Yet its popularity spread to all classes of Egyptian society. These plays came under the censorship of the government in 855 H. (15th century) when Sultàn Jaqmaq « ordered the plays stopped and the props burned. He asked the actors to promise never to return to them » (15). His reasons were either the political sarcasm within the performances or the immoral behaviour of the audience (i.e., smoking hash, drinking wine). However, the shadow plays did not cease. Not long after that, another report dated 1517 mentioned that Sultàn Salîm I, who had conquered Egypt, saw a shadow play performed and expressed his admiration for it. He asked the players to go with him to Istanbul so his son could see these plays. This report was interpreted to mean that Egypt introduced the shadow plays to the Turks, which is a matter of doubt. The obvious conclusion from this report is that Egypt's shadow plays had unique characteristics.

The nature of *qaràqùz* and shadow plays depends on puns and ridicule. The immoral and improper elements are numerous. Some of these immoralities and the harsh mocking of the religious men led some muftis « to prevent certian forms of imitation, acting as a censor to prohibit any presentation which might belittle

(14) 'Ahm·d Taymùr. Khayàl la Zill, Cairo : 1957, p. 22.
(15) 'Abd al-Hamîd Yunis, p. 22.

respected institutions like those of education, law or religion » (16).

The shadow plays and the *qaràqùz* attracted the dervishes, especially in Turkey. This led A. Metin to the bold judgement that « of all countries inhabited by Muslim races, Turkey was the place where the Muslims have allowed live dramatic representation to assert itself under some religious pretext or other » (17). It is clear that all the evidence mentioned before proves the mistake of this judgement. Metin ignored the ta'àzi with its religious content and rituals. He also did not look closely at Southeast Asian folk and popular troupes which « dramatized Islamic stories as much because they were exciting tales as because they were Islamic in content » (18).

Today these theatrical arts do not get the attention they once did. Some are still alive, but others have faded ; some are still performed, but others have ceased. The *ta'àzi* remains. It continues as part of shi'at ritual in 'Ashura' and has of course helped to build a ground for the modern Persian theater. The *orta oiunu* lives on, in a modified version. No longer is it exclusively an open-air spectale. Today it is performed « in large coffee houses, and even in theaters fitted out in modern European style, with a stage, a curtain, and seats for

(16) A. Metin, pp. 11-12.

(17) Ibid., p. 11.

(18) L. R. Brandon, Theater in South-east Asia, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 33.

the orchestra » (19). The *qaràqùz* has expanded. Its greatest popularity is found in the larger cities, namely, Cairo, Tunis, Algiers and Isnanbul.

But the shadow play has ceased. The reason for its demise lies in its very nature. To become a legitimate competitor of western theater, which it closely resembled, the shadow play needed a curtain to fall at the end of the act, and at that point the characters would need to change from puppets to real characters. This development never occurred, and when the shadow play faced western theater, it took a bow. The shadow play did, however, manage to survive until the early twentieth century. At that time the audience transferred its attention to the modern theater, which replaced the shadow plays with farce and vaudeville. Clearly the fall of the shadow play was not a matter of religious prejudice ; it merely gave way to western theater.

These rudimentary theatrical arts, the first stage in the history of the theater in the Islamic world, played the same role as the rituals of Bacchus in the history of the Greek theater.

II

Modern theater has emerged in different Islamic countries. It emerged in Lebanon in 1847, in Turkey in 1856, in Syria in 1865, in Iran in 1869, and in Egypt

(19) Marhnovich, p. 16.

in 1870. It was not accidental that the theater appeared in the Islamic countries between 1847-1870. It seems that the people were living in a time when a new kind of theatrical art had to appear to fit the changes—political, economic, and cultural—in the society (20).

When modern theater was introduced to Islamic countries, there were no jurists opposing it in Turkey Iran, India or the Arab world In India, Muslims astively participated in the theater. Even before the emergence of modern Islamic theater, historical works and autobiographies of renowned sheikhs mentioned the theater. There were no expressions of opposition to this art ; on the contrary, there were signs of acceptance.

The first report mentioned was written by al-Jabarti. In his book *'Ajà'ib al-Athàr* (« The Remarkable Monuments ») are accounts from the 11th sha'bàn 1215 H. (December 29, 800 A.D.) that describe the French who attended their own theater once every ten days for amusement and fun. Of course, these plays were in the French language (12). Al-Jabarti did not mention that he saw them, but being the kind of man he was, that is, a historian looking for things to write about, he could have. It would not have been strange for him to go to see these plays. However, he did not

(20) See the details of these circumstances which led to the emergence of the Islamic theater in A. Sh. al-Haggagi, Arab wa fan al-Masrah.

(21) Abd al Rahmān al-Jaberti, 'Ajà'ib al-'Athàr Fi al Tràjim wa al Akhbàr, Cairo : al Matba'ah al 'Amiriyya al Sharqiyya, 1322 H., Vol. III, p. 149.

offer any personal opinion, either favorable or unfavorable.

Later, Rifà'a Rafi'i al-Tahtāwi, a graduate of 'Azhar University, went to Paris to be the 'Imam of a student mission. Then, the govenment gave him a scholarship to study there. No single historian, or political or social writer, can attack him for any immoral deed, and his Islamic beliefs are beyond question. He saw the theater in Paris, and he wrote in his autobiography *Takhlîs al'Ibrîz 'ila Talkhîs baris* (the purification of gold in the summary of Paris) his opinion about this theater :

> The Parisians have a place of entertainment called Theatre or spectacle ,a place where reality lives upon the stage. In fact, its playing is education in the form of fun. For the French, the theater defines morality--one sees the good deeds praised and the bad ones ridiculed. The plays are full of what makes us laugh, but much that makes us cry (22).

Of course, this is clear recognition from an eminent sheikh of the art of theater.

There is also an interesting account preserved by David Urguhart. He describes one of the earliest performances of the theater January 13, 1850, less than two years after Màrùn al-Naqqàsh had estabiished the

(22) A. R. al-Tahtàwi, Takhlîs al 'Ibrîz ila Talkhis baris. Cairo ;al Halàbi, 1958, p. 105.

first western theater in the Islamic world. Urguhart noted the feeling of the audience toward the performance :

> (Though) the play was long, very long, no one went away, and everyone seemed content and merry. Frequent applause rewarded the author and the actors ; and at the close Jaffer, to act his part of the life, threw handfuls of coin among us, on which the stage was assailed from all sides with showers of roses (23).

The most important part of the account was the description of the qàdi and the two muftis of Lebanon who attended these performances. Furthermore, one of the muftis participated in the performance from his seat in the audience :

> A short Farce occupied the interval between the second and the third acts. It was a husband befooled by his wife, a very grave case, and the ex-Mufti judged it to be so ; taking the most vivid interest in its progress, and repeatedly informing the one party of the proceedings of the other. In fact he identified himself with the action, somewhat in the fashion of the ancient chorus, bewailing or approving. The husband at last is undeceived, by observing from the window at the side the lady and the lover : while the Mufti from the « Stable d'Orches-

(23) D. Urguhart, The Lebanon Mount Souria — A History and a Diary. London : T. C. NeWly. 1880. Vol. II, p. 178

tre » commented vigorously on the guilty nature of the proceedings of the one, and the extreme imbecility of the other. The roars of la ughter which these cross-purposes produced conferred on the farce unbounded success, which all were agreed to attribute to the actor whose part the author had not inserted (24).

In Egypt, before theater was known, Khedive 'Isma'îl built al-Azbakiyya Theater in 1868. He then built an opera in 1869 to receive foreign companies. From what is known, no criticism, either printed or spoken, was made of Khedive 'Ismà'il for building these theaters. Ya'qùb Sannù', in 1870, established the first theater in Cairo for performances in Arabic. An 'Azhariyyat sheikh wrote a play which was performed by the company of Ya'qùb Sannù (25). This clearly showed not only that al-'Azhar, the world center of Islamic studies, did not move against the theater, but also that one of its graduates had been involved in the theatrical movement since its emergence in Egypt. This could prove one important thing : Islam and the muslims neither prohibited .theater nor thought to prohibit it.

There are a few events recorded in the history of modern Islamic theater which simplistic thinkers could take as an indication that Islam prohibited the art of

(24) Urguhart, II, 178.

(25) See 'Ibràhîm 'Abdu, Abu Nazzara, Cairo : al Matba'a al-Namùdhjiyya, 1953, p. 32

theater. But a careful look at these events does not sup port such a conclusion. The first world mentionen against theater was written about 'Abu Khalîl al-Qabbàni started his theater in Damascus around 1865 but closed it in 1884. A report that discusses the reason for the closing of his company mentions that al-Sheikh Sa'îd al-Ghabra, one of his contemporaries, was jealous of his success. So, «He travelled to al-'Astàna, the capital of the Ottoman Caliph, to complain of 'Abu Khalîl al-Qabbàni » (26). He got his chance when the Caliph 'Abd al Hamîd II went to Jum'ah prayar, or Friday prayer. Then al-Ghabra loudly and enthusiastically warned the caliph of the new heresy, the theater. He said : « Help us, Prince of the believers, for adultery and sins are spreading throughout the Shàm, endangering our honor ; virtue is dead. and the women mix with the men » (27). The caliph then gave orders to the Governor of Shàm to close 'Abu Khalîl al-Qabbani's theater and prevent him from acting (28).

For many reasons this account about Abu Khalil al-Qabbàni seems to be spurious. The report depicts 'Abd al Hamîd II in the image of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs who used to go to the mosque where Muslims would approach them with their problems. However, this practice existed only during the aforemention-

(26) Ibràhîm al-Kîlàni, « 'Ahmed Abu Khalil al-Qabbani », Majallat al Mu'allim al 'Arabi, 1, 1948, 46.

(27) Ibid.

(28) Ibid.

ed shining period of Muslim history and had long since disappeared by the time of 'Abd al Hamîd II. Also, no ordinary Muslim possessed sufficient courage to address the caliph in the way al-Ghabra spoke. We could assume that al-Ghabra did act this way in the presence of the caliph. But nothing can make us believe that the caliph would immediately give orders to prevent al-Qabbani from performing, for the caliph himself used to attend performances of the *orta oiunu* and the foreign European companies. He was not against modern Turkish theater, which emerged in 1856 (29). In fact, no reports mentioned that he was against the art of theater, even though it is known that he was against the political attitude of art in general.

It should be mentioned that this report, as it appeared, was a complete forgery about the man who founded the local art of musical theater using folktale subjects. Either the report was based on hearsay invented by an Egyptian who wanted to show the enthusiasm of the Egyptians, their protection of the freedom of the artist, and their appreciation of the art, or it was narrated by one of al-Qabbani's students to prove his importance and to encourage the audience to come and see the man whose theater had been closed by the caliph. This report proves nothing regarding whether or not Islam prevented the art of theater.

A second event in the history of the theater, which

(29) Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., The Oxford Companion to Theater, 3rd ed Lodon : Oxford University Press, 1967,p. 962

may lead some to think that Islam stood against theater, was the dispute between al-Sheikh al-Dars and other writers in September of 1902. Al-Dars had attended the performance of a company which had visited his hometown, Dimyàt. He had no knowledge of theater ; therefore, when a theatrical company visited Dimyàt, accompanied by a lot of advertisements of its farce Ghannùj and his wife, al-Dars attended, maybe out of curiosity. He was disappointed. Although the word *Ghannùj* in Arabic makes it very clear that the farce would have a sexual theme, he was astonished to see the performance full of what he considered sexual scenes. He became furious and wrote two articles against what he called Egyptian theater. Using this visiting company as an example, he compared it with the European theater and condemned Egyptian theater as immoral and corrupt (30). He regarded European theater as a school of education and glorified it « because the European play are related to morals and decorated by virtue, purity, and perfection. Their writers are learned professors. Their hearts are rich with love for their country » (31).

Al-Dars' comments clearly show that he knew little about the European theater. Even his comparison demonstrates a lack of knowledge. It seems as though he was writing from his image of what the European thea-

(30) Al-Sheikh Mostafa al-Dars, « al Tamthîl al 'Arabi » (Arab Acting), al-Muqattam, Cairo, Vol. 4088, 9.2.1902.

(31) M. al-Dars, « al Tamthîl al 'Arabia Fi Misr », al-Muqattam, Vol. 4100, 24.9.1902

ter should be, and he may have created this image by reading some comments written by Egyptians who had visited Europe. It is worth noting that this Sheikh did not mention anything about Islam's prohibiting theater or being against it. He himself was against such immoral behavior on the stage as he had seen in this farce. Yet his acceptance of European theatrical art was clear in his comparison. Many writers supported al-Dars, and many others opposed him ; but not one of them mentioned that Islam prohibited this new art. In reality, there was not much difference in their aim, which was to get theater on the path toward nationalization.

The third event was the decree (1918) of Sheikh al-'Islam, the spiritual head of Islam, which prevented women from performing or acting on the stage (32). The decree of Sheikh al-'Islam was of more significant concern to society than to the art of theater. Though no one gave attention to them, Sheikh al-'Azhar had valid reasons for his decree, as the background given below indicates.

The Egyptian theater had some success since its development. Many new companies had been established. Some names, such as those of Salàma Hijàzi (1905) and George 'Abyad (1912), had become famous. Such success had attracted some people looking only for money who had entered the theater in order to make it a pro-

(32) Muhlddith, «al Mumassila al wa Taniyya wa Manshùr Sheikh al-Islam, (The National Actress and the Creed of Sheikh al-Islam), al-Akhbàr Cairo : Vol 7257, 1.9.1918.

fitable business, and in so doing had tried to appeal to the prurience of the audience. That they were not introducing new concepts to society was already clear from their plays. These companies started in small groups, visiting villages and small cities. They did manage to get some profits, but never large ones until World War I.

During World War I, Egypt was struggling to get rid of British colonialism. The British government found a chance to separate Egypt from Turkey and to announce their domination of Egypt. Egyptian nationalists continued their struggle, but their goal was threatened by the interests of that group of « nouveau riche » who looked for profitable pleasures. Sensual entertainment became good business. Newcasinos opened ; coffee rooms, attempting to use pseudo-theater to attract these rich people,presented a one-act play which developed into a sexual farce. Even the cafes in the midst of the red light districts tried to be theaters. Egyptian nationalists believed it their duty to stand against these counterfeit theaters for two reasons :

1) To prevent Egyptian moral from collapsing, and

2) To protect the art of theater from becoming a tool of cheap entertainment.

In 1915 occurred the nationalists' first attempt to fight the corruption of the theater (33). In order to achieve that, they started a theatrical association (34) to help create a national Egyptian theater. They also wrote articles in the daily newspapers condemning that kind of vulgar art, requesting that the government act to stop it (35). This struggle produced a vast number of articles which could be considered more as social criticism than theatrical criticism. They pushed the religious leaders to stand against it. Sheikh al-'Azhar responded by announcing his decree.

This movement succeeded in producing legitimate local plays. Muhammed Taymùr, the most important figure in that period, wrote three plays (1917-1921) using subjects from local Egyptian life. There was hope that he would help Egyptian theater achieve universal recognition, but his short life sid not permit this hope to be realized. This does not mean that the movement toward the Islamization of theater ceased ; in fact, the theatrical movement attracted numerous literary arists to the theater.

'Ahmad Shawqi, the prince of Arabic Poetry, as his contemporaries called him, wrote plays with themes from Islamic history and from ancient Egyptian his

(33) F. 'Antùn, « Fi al Adab wa al Fùnùn al Jamila» (In Literature and Fine Arts), al-Jarida Cairo, Vol. 2511, 7.17.1951.

(34) Hisèn Fattùh, « Jam'iyyat Ansàr al Tamthil (Theatrical Patrons Association), al-Mu'ayyid, Cairo, Vol. 72540, 4.16.1919.

(35) Mikha'il Armanyùs, « al Vaudeville al Khali' » (The Corrupt vaudeville), al-Watan, Cairo, Vol. 6333, 3.4.1916.

tory. In 1926 he wrote his first poetic plays, (36) which were also the first plays written in arabic poetry. His plays achieved some success, but it seemed that Arabic poetry had a long way to go before it could be adapted to theater. It is worth mentioning that he achieved great success with theatrical poetry, in his social play « al Sit Huda 2» (Mrs. Huda).

Now two men, Taymùr and Shawqi, had entered the theatrical world. Both were considered in the top of their society, and both had the respect of all social classes. Taymùr's family was connencted with the royal family, and Shawqi was considered the court poet until 1913. Then he turned to the people and won the respect of the whole Islamic world. This meant that the art of theater had complete recognition from the Islamic world

III

It was not amazing that the first play of the Islamic theater in the period of universality was written by a judge named Tawfîq al-Hakîm (1933) (37). What is interesting about this play is that the writer took his subject from a Quranic story called « Cave Men », known in the West as the « Seven Sleepers » (38).

(36) Muhammad Mandùr, A'làm al Shi'r al Arabi al Hadîth (Prominent Modern Arabic Poets), Beirut : al Maktab al Tujàri, 1970, p. 71.

(37) Isma'îl Adham, Tawfîq al-Hakîm, Cairo : Dàr Sà'd Li el-Tibà'ah wa al Nashr, 1945, p. 48.

(38) J. Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, in Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert M. Hutchins, Chicago : Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, p. 544.

Did you think the Sleepers of the Cave and al-Raquim were a wonder among our signs ?

When the youth sought refuge in the Cave, they said : « Lord, have mercy on us and guide us out of our ordeal ».

We made them sleep in the cave for many years, and then awakened them to find out who could best tell the length of their stay.

We shall recount to you their story in all truth. They were young men who had faith in their Lord, and on whom We had bestowed Our guidance. We put courage in their hearts when they stood up and said : « Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We call on no other god besides Him : for if we did we should be blaspheming. Our people serve other gods besides Him, though they have no convincing proof of their divinity. Who is more wicked than the man who invents a falsehood against Allah ?

« When you depart from them and from their idols, go to the Cave for shelter. Allah will extend to you His mercy and prepare for you a means of safety ».

You might have seen the rising sun decline to the right of their cavern and, as it set, go past them on the left, while they stayed within. That was one of Allah's signs. He whom Allah guides is rightly

guided ; but he whom He misleads shall find no friend to guide him.

You might have thought them awake, though they were sleeping. We turned them about to right and left, while their dog lay at the cave's entrance with legs outstretched. Had you looked upon them, you would have surely turned your back and fled in terror.

We roused them that they might question one another. « How long have you been here ? » asked one of them. « A day, or but a few hours, » replied some ; and others : « Your Lord knows best how long we have stayed here. Let one of you go to the city with this silver coin and bring you back some wholesome food. Let him conduct himself with caution and not disclose your where-abouts to anyone. For if they find you out they will stone you to death or force you back into their faith. Then you shall surely be ruined ».

Thus We revealed their secret, so that men might know that Allah's promise was true and that the Hour of Doom was sure to come.

The people argued among themselves conern ing them. Some said : « Build a monument over remains. Their Lord alone knows who they were ». Those who were to win said : « Let us build a chapel over them ».

Some will say : « The sleepers were three : their dog was the fourth ». Others, guessing at the unknown, will say : « They were five : their dog was the sixth ». And yet others : « Seven : their dog was the eighth ».

Say : « My Lord alone knows their number. Few know them ».

Therefore, when you dispute about them, adhere only to that which is revealed and do not ask any Christian concerning them (39).

Al-Hakîm had also consulted commentators of the Quran, primarily al-Tabari (40), the greatest of the commentators. The Quran used the story of the Cave Men to prove to the pagan Arab that there is a resurrection. In Islam sleepig is a small death, and as man sleeps and awakes, he dies and is resurrected.

The story, accrding to an account by al-Tabari is that three young Roman men, escaping from the massacre of the Emperor Decius, met a Christian shepherd who helped them by leading them to a cave. His dog followed them (41). They slept, but not just for a

(39) The Quran, 18 : 9-26. The translation used throughout of the Holy Quran is by N. J. Dawood, 4th ed., New York : Penguin Books, 1974.

(40) See Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, jàmi' al Bayàn Fi Tafsîr al Quràn (Collection of Rhetoric in Interpretiog the Quran), Cairo : al Matba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1321 H., Vol. XV, pp. 121-143.

(41) Nasîr al Dîn 'Abu Saïd Umar b. Muhammad al Shiràzi al-Baydàwi, Anwàr al Tanzîl (Lights of Revelation), Cairo : Maktabat al-Halabi, 1320 H., p. 219.

night—for more than three hundred years, They awoke after a Christian reign began and the people started disputing whether God would resurrect man with or without his body. The young men soon realized the truth of the years of their sleeping, so they went back to the cave to die while the dispute was solved among the people (42).

Al-Hakîm turned this Islamic story to the theater. The play begins after the three men and their dog awake from a sleep of more than three hundred years to find everything changed. They can not believe that three hundred years have actually passed. The first one to realize the truth is the shepherd, Yamlîkha, who returns to the cave to die. The second man is Marnùsh, the minister of the Emperor Decius, who realizes that his child had died a Roman hero at the age of eighty-three. The third one, Mishilînya, has more to do in his new life. He finds the daughter of the new king similar to his former lover, the daughter of Decius. He does not care if the time is one day or three hundred years as long as she is with him, but the girl tries to make him remember the gap between them. She is a girl of twenty while he is a man of more than three hundred.

Finding it hard to fulfil his love, Mishilinya returns to the cave. After a while the girl goes to the cave

(42) Mahmùd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, al Kashshàf än Haqa'iq al **Tanzîl wa 'Uyùn al Aqàwîl Fi wijub al T'awîl (The Exploration** and Truth of Revelation), Cairo : al Matba'a al-Bahiyya, 1334 H., p. 564.

to save him, for she has realized that by love they coll conquer time. But he is in the last minute of his life. She asks her teacher to leave her there when they close the cave. He says that he will tell the people that she was a saint. She refuses that and asks him to tell the people that she was a woman in love (43).

Al-Hakîm wanted to write an Egyptian play with an Islamic subject (44). He also wanted to talk about the resurrection--not the resurrection of the body, but the resurrection of Egypt. He tried to analyze the resurrection beliefs of ancient Egypt, the Egypt that lived « under the authority of one word, the resurrection, Which controlled its ideas, its hearts, beliefs and its feelings. It is a word of four faces like the pyramids. The first face is death. The second face is time. The third face is heart and the fourth face is immortality » (45).

Al-Hakîm connected Egypt with time and he mentioned in one of the dialogues of the play that since Egypt wanted to fight time with youth, there was not a single statue in Egypt representing decrepiude. Every picture of a god, a man or an animal was a representation of youth. Everything was young. But time had

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(43) See Tawfîq al-Hakîm, Ahl al Kahf (Cave Men), Cairo : Maktabat al-Adab, n.d.

(44) A. Sh. al-Haggagi, al 'Ustùra Fi al Masrah al Mu'asir (Myth in Contemporary Egyptian Theater). Cairo ; Dàr al Thaqàfa, 1975) Vol. II, p. 999.

(45) T. al-Hakim Zahrat al Umr (The Blossom of Life), Cario : Maktabat al-'Adab, n.d., p. 239.

killed Egypt while she was young, and time would not cease to kill her whenever he wanted and whenever fate wanted her to die (46).

The play was received well in all Islamic Arabic countries and was soon translated into most Islamic languages. It inaugurated a new era in Islamic theater. However, in the 50's some radical critics categorized it as a representation of reactionist literature (47), stating that « it reflects an Egyptian understanding of time which reinforces the feeling of escaping defeat and reassures the philosophy of failure. Also it fights intelligence and insight to defend the irrational and the nonsensical » (48). Another critic saw « the spirit of defeat clearly in it » (49). But neither of those critics understood the author's main point, which was to say that « if time wanted to kill Egypt, there still remains for Egypt the heart which will enable her to live and be immortal. Heart is the only power which is able to fight time » (50).

Al-Hakîm was wholly right in using the heart in opposition to time, especially at the time he wrote-- after the collapse of the 1919 revolution when a dicta-

(46) T. al-Hakîm, Ahl al Kahf, p. 150.

(74) M. al-'Alim fi al Thaqàfa al Masriyya (In the Egyptian Culture), Cairo : Dàr al Fikr al Jadîd, 1955, p. 87.

(48) M. A. al-'Âlim, fi al Thaqafa al Masriyya, p. 88.

(49) A. al-Qut,fi al adab al masri al Mu'àsir (In Contemporary Egyptetian Literature), Cairo : Dàr Misr Li al-Tibà'ah, 1955, p. 73.

(50) A. Sh. al-Haggagi, al 'Ustura, p. 393.

torship was ruling under the name of democracy. He saw that there was nothing that could resurrect Egypt and solve her problem except the heart. This tragedy, which came out of the cloak of the Islamic and western tradition, was the start of a real Islamic theater.

The writer, encouraged by his success, wrote other tragedies using subjects from Islamic stories, such as Solomon al-hakîm (« Solomon the wise »). He also wrote a play about the Prophet Muhammad. It is interesting to note that he wrote a play called 'King Oedipus », taking his theme from the great Sophocles play « Oedipus the King ». The play was translated into French and performed in Paris. The play received excellent reviews. The Oedipus in the play was no longer Oedipus the Greek but was portrayed as an Islamic ideal.

This makes Professor G. Jacob's suggestion questionable. Jacob suggests that tragedy, « as it existed in the dramatic literature of non-Islamic countries, has no appeal to the Arab world since the conflict which is inherent in tragedy, the struggle between man and man, or man and fate, is a concept which is totally alien to a culture in which submission to the will of God is the highest good (51). Such a statement shows clearly that Jacob lacks understanding of Islam and has a completely Sufistic or folkloric idea about Islam. He also forgets that though tragedy is based on conflict this con-

(51) Quoted from A Metin, p. 11.

flict does not have to be between man and fate. Man in Islam is always in conflict, either with Satan, his fellowman, or with himself. Such constant conflict gave an interesting subject to the eminent writers of the theater.

In Islam Satan represents the power of evil in opposition to the power of good, represented by the angels. The chief Satan is called 'Iblîs. Although 'Iblîs was not an angel, he was their chief (52). He represented a nature different from that of the angels, for he was created from fire while the angels were created from light. 'Iblis, who lived in activity and with the feeling of excellence, was suddenly faced with 'Adam. Before God breathed the spirit into him, 'Iblîs used to come and kick him. While Adam made a clattering noise, he said to him : « You are not for clattering and for some reason you were created and if I had the authority over you, I'd perish you and if you had the authority over me, I'd disobey you » (53).

When God breathed the spirit into Adam, he became a live being. Then the true conflict between 'Iblis and his creator emerged. This conflict was defined later, with its subject being man. Allah requested that all the angels bow to 'Adam. All of them bowed e snt 'Iblîs. At this time started the greet conflicutbetween man and 'Iblīs. The Quran describes this moment clearly :

(52) Al Tabari, Jami' al Bayàn, p. 88.
(53) Ibid.

Your Lord said to the Angels : « I am creating man from dry clay, from black moulded loam. When I have fashioned him and breathed of My spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him ».

All the angels prostrated themselves, except Satan. He refused to prostrate himself.

« Satan », said Allah, « why do you not prostrate yourself ? »

He replied : « I will not bow to a mortal created of dry clay, of black moulded loam ».

« Begone », said Allah, « you are accursed. My curse shall be on you till Judgement-day ».

« Lord », said Satan, « reprieve me till the Day of Resurrection ».

He answered : « You are reprieved till the Appointed Day ».

« Lord », said Satan, « since you have led me astray, I will seduce mankind on Earth :

I will seduce them all, except those that faithfully serve you » **(54).**

But Allah made a covenant with himself that Satan

would not have power over his servants. This was clear in the reply of Allah to the request of Satan :

(54) The Quran, 15:28-40.

« This is the right course for Me. You shall have no power over My servants, except the sinners who follow you » (55).

'Iblîs went directly into action against man. Having been dismissed from the mercy of Allah, he was alone, so he tried to find himself an ally. He found this ally in the serpent whom he used to seduce Adam and Eve. This serpent is mentioned in the Old Testament, as it

> was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he had said unto the woman, « Yea, hath God said, « Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden »
>
> And the women said unto the serpent, « We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden ;
>
> But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, « Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die » (56).

The commentators of the Quran took the role of the serpent from the Old Testament and connected it with 'Iblîs. Most of them mentioned that the serpent was the only animal who let 'Iblîs enter her stomach and talk to Eve through her, even though there is no mention in the Quran about the role of the serpent in this event or in any other. From this account the theatrical author imagines 'Iblîs voice like the hiss of the snake (57).

(55) The Quran, 15:41-42.

(56) Genesis 3:1-4.

(57) Fathi Radwàn, Dumù' Iblîs, Cairo : Dàr al Ma'arif, 1956, p. 28.

Adam was an easy victim for 'Iblîs He ate from the tree, and Allah requested him to descend to Earth. It was clear in the mind of the Muslims that Adam did not intentionally disobey God. But he followed the advice of Satan, who swore in the name of Almighty Allah that it is good to eat from the forbidden tree. Adam ate from it because he never thought that any one would swear in the name of Allah and lie (58). Adam and Eve had no knowledge of evil, so they were easy victims. But would Adam on Earth be again an easy victim for 'Iblîs ?

Allah gave Adam all the power to protect himself and built life on the Earth. When Adam descended to Earth he was fearful : « His head reached the sky and his legs were on the earth. The angels used to fear him » (59). This being which the angels feared would not be an easy prey for 'Iblîs. Moreover, Allah had granted him knowledge since his creation, and man now had more knowledge than the angels.

> He taught Adam the names of all things and then set them before the angels, saying : « Tell Me the names of these, if what you say be true ».
>
> « Glory to You », they replied, « we have no knowledge except that which You have given us. You alone are wise and all-knowing ».

(58) Jarîr Il-Tabari, Târîkh al Rusul wa al Dulùk (The History of Prophets and Kings), Cairo : Dàr al Ma'àrif, 1968, Vol. 1, p. 172

(59) Al-Tabari, Jàmî' al Bayàn, p. 96.

Then said He to Adam : « Tell them their names ». And when Adam had named them, He said : « Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and all that you hide and all that you reveal » ? (60).

As a man had more honor than angels, they feared him. 'Iblîs must not know less about man than the angels know.

This man and 'Iblîs shared the earth, so life became a battle between the two of them. Both have also shared the action in many plays since the start of Islamic theater. One of the excellent plays is Solomon al-Hakīm, « the wise ». Solomon, the one that Israelite and Muslim tradition believes had a control over Satan, was the protagonist of this play. He was under the temptation of one of the genies who led him astray. Solomon died after he tortured himself as repentance to God. After the death of Solomon, the genie thought that he would tempt the fisherman. He offered him the kingdom of Solomon, Solomon's wife whom once the fisherman had loved, and Solomon's wealth. The fisherman refused all his offers, preferring to be a poor fisherman than to be king servant of Satan. The fisherman had the experience to be able to withstand the temptation, and the genie, astonished to find another Solomon able to fight evil, was displeased with any power except his own.

(60) The Quran, 2:31-33.

The Genie :

Amazing... I was thinking that I was facing Solomon only... and Solomon is dead.

Fisherman :

Dead... but the seed of the wisdom of Solomon did not die — here I am facing you ... be ready for the fight... the war between us will continue (61).

The scene in the play is similar in some ways to what had happened between Christ and the devil.

> Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceedingly high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ;
>
> And saith unto him, « All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me ».
>
> Then saith Jesus unto him, « Get thee hence, Satan ; for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve' » (62).

The fight between Satan and man continued. Allah gave some men the power to defeat him and control his action : Solomon, Muhammad, all the prophets, and the people who follow the word and law of God. Satan tried

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(61) T. al-Hakim, Sulaymān al-Hakim (Solomon the Wise), Cairo Maktabat al-'Adab, n.d. p. 155.

(62) **Matthew 4:8-10.**

wealth, authority, and women to tempt man. He succeeded only with the weak ones. As he used woman to tempt man, he used man to tempt woman.

Fathi Radwān in his play « The Tears of 'Iblīs » gave a woman power to conquer 'Ibîs. By har goodness she helped to eliminate the evil in her society. because he Was not able to stop her,, her felt in danger. So he came in the image of a handsome man to seduce her, but he fell in love with her. The girl realized his truth. Afterwards she gave birth to a child. Since the child grew up safe from 'Iblîs, he was able to continue the job of his mother. Then Satan got tired of this boy and decided to kill him. The girl killed herself but left a son to hurt 'Iblîs. She knew that Iblîs would not be able to hurt his son. 'Iblîs has begged her to stay with him. He had promised her that he would change his ways of tempting man and that he would return to Allah to ask forgiveness. The girl could not trust him because she knew that he was the one who stood by his choice against the will of Allah.

Satan :

But Allah is a forgiver and merciful...

'Asma' :

You mention this... and you know it... ?

Satan :

I know him like you do ... I know him more than you do but pride and obstinancy made me an

atheist. It pains me to prostrate myself before Adam (63).

After the death of his son, 'Iblîs went to the same place at which his son was killed. One of the Satans looked at him in wonder.

One of the Satans :

Do you cry ?... Is this really tears... ? Is this a tear of 'Iblîs .. ?

Iblīs (standing up) :

These are the first tears for Iblīs... He knows it when he knows love, but he will not know love after now ... After today man will never see the tears of 'Iblîs (64).

But these were not the first tears of 'Iblîs. In Islamic tradition, he cried twice. In an account related to the Prophet that « when man read the Adoration (a chapter in the Quran) and then prostrated to Allah, Satan isolated himself and cried. He said : 'Woe to me. The man was ordered to prostrate and he did while I refused so I'll be in hell' » (65). The second time he

(63) F. Radwàn, Dumù' 'Iblîs, p. 57.

(64) F. Radwàn, Dumù' Iblīs, p. 126.

(65) 'Abu 'Abd Allah al Ansàri al-Qurtubi, Tafsîr al Qurtubi, al Jàmi' Li Ahkàm al Qur'àn (The Interpretation of al-Qurtubi, The Collector of Quranic Law, Cairo : Dàr al Sha'b 1961, p. 522.

used his tears to deceive Adam and Eve ; «He cried. They felt sorry for him when they heard him ; they asked him 'What makes you cry ?'. He said, 'I am crying for you. You'll die and you will leave the prosperity and the honor which you are living in'. His words affected them. Then he came and whispered to them and said, 'O, Adam, do you want me to lead you to the tree of immortality and an immortal kingdom ?' » (66).

Looking at the nature of 'Iblīs, man imagined him in man's nature, since organization is part of the nature of Islam. This reflects the idea of the Muslim about his world. The Muslim sees Satan as a king with his own kingdom. He has his own Satan people which he is using to tempt man (67). His people are his children, so he has a wife. Some of his children have sexual relations with human beings. Some have the kind of relations with man which Gœthe's Faust had.

It was therefore not strange for Muslims to use Gœthe's Faust as inspiration for their work. The story of men who surrender themselves to Satan has echoes in the entire Middle East, inside the mosques, inside the churches, and from the story tellers in the villages and cities. It was mentioned that Faust was a real man (68).

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(66) Al-Tabari, Tarīkh al-Rusul, pp. 110-111.

(67) 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Husayni, al Ma'rifa 'ind al-Hakīm al Turmudhi (Gnosticism according to al-Hakím al Turmudhi, Cairo : Dàr al Kàtib al 'Arabi, n.d., p. 212.

(68) See the introduction to Goethe's Faust, trans. A. G. Hathan London : J. M. Dent, 1908, p. xiii.

His story was developed until it became Mythic ; Euope pean society accept ti. In fact, stories of man who sold themselves to Satan are known in the folklore of European countries (69). So Islamic societies were not unique in that.

The most important writer who used this as a subject of a play is called 'Ahmad 'Ali Bakthîr. Even though it followed the same plot as Gœthe's, his play « The New Faust » (70) carried Islamic thoughts about Satan, and his Faust is the Islamic Faust. Bakthîr ended his play with the forgiveness of God, using a verse from the Quran which reads : « O serene soul ! Return to your Lord, joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join My servants and enter My Paradise » (71).

Bakthîr is the only first-class theatrical writer who devotes his writing to Islam. He uses theater as a pulpit for Islamic ideas even though he stated that the purpose of the artist is « to make the preacher serve the theatrical artist, not be his master » (72). The preacher, however, controlled him. His plays, even those which used an ancient Egyptian or Greek myth

(69) See L. Spence, An Introduction to Mythology, London : Harrap, 1931, p. 228.

(70) The play has not been published. I obtained the manuscript from the second program at the Cairo Broadcasting Station. The date of the manuscript is 10.8.1967.

(71) The Quran, 90:330.

(72) A. A. Bakthîr, min khilàl Taiàribi al Masrahiyya (Through my Experience in Theater), Cairo Dàr al Ma'rifa, 1964, p. 36.

showed clearly that he wanted to urge his audience to walk in the path of Islam. He lived a true Muslim life, preaching that it is important to return to belief in Allah and follow his right path. In his play *Osiris*, Bakthîr made Osiris Christ, but Osiris's son took the way of Muhammad (73). His *Oedipus* plays do not use the entire myth used by Sophocles in his trilogy. Bakthîr's Oedipus is no longer tied to Greek mythology, for he created a Muslim Oedipus who remained king only until he had stopped the corruption of the temple's people, then he left (74). And Bakthîr's other two plays, *Oedipus at Cologne* and *Antigone,* have no relation to his *Oedipus.*

Bakthîr's goas coincided with the aims of members of the Muslim brotherhood movement. They considered him their official writer even though he announced in 1954, after Nasser had dissolved the brotherhood, that he wrote *Oedipus* to fight those who were making religion a business, meaning the Muslim brotherhood (75). The Muslim brotherhood not only accepted theater but also used it as a propagandistic tool to express their ideas. The acceptance of theater by a conservative Muslim group meant only one thing : the door was wide open for theater to be considered a part of Islamic literature.

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(73) See A. A. Bakthîr, Osiris, Cairo : Matba'at Masr, 1959.
(74) See A. A. Bakthîr. Ma'sàt Oedip (Tragedy of Oedip), Cairo : Maktabat Masr, 1949.
(75) A. A. Bakthîr. Min Khilîl Tajàribi, p. 92.

Most of the Muslim brotherhood plays use the theme of Satan in conflict with man, but this is only one part of the theme of conflict. Another part is the conflict between man and man, and such conflict is, Muslims believe, part of man's destiny. After Adam committed his first sin Allah said : « Go hence, We said, 'and may your offspring be enemies to each other' » (76). And the life of man on Earth is full of fighting. Men fight among themselves for different reasons : jealousy, selfishness, authority, and numerous psychological, social, and economic motives.

Mahmùd Taymùr, an Egyptian writer who knew this truth, was amazed at men who attributed all evil to Satan since the Quran describes some men as human Satans. One of the contemporary commentators sees that « the human Satans are stronger than Genie's Satan. Their evilness and harm is stronger than the real Satan's. All their corruption is from themselves. The worst of them are their leaders from the dictator kings, the hypocritic scholars, the ignorant worshippers, the arrogant rich and erring poets » (77).

in his play *Ashtar min 'Iblîs* (« more intelligent than 'Iblîs »), Taymùr wanted to prove the existence of human evil. The main subject of this play is the desire of the new king in Statan's kingdom to make a change.

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(76) The Quran, 2:36.

(77) **Muhammed Rashîd Rida, Tafsîr al-Fatiha (Interpretation of the** Opening), Cairo : Matba'at al-Manär, 13133 H., p. 141.

The kingdom has become corrupt and has a lot of problems which need to be solved--a class problem, feudalism controlling the society, poverty in every place, and a collapsing morality. His idea is that the Satans have spent more time in corrupting man than man needed to be corrupted. It is time now for them to look at their problems and make their system an agent of goodness for human beings. He wanted to open a new era for the Satans. To do this he asked one of the Satans to kidnap a child. They put her in a place surrounded by a lake that nobody would be able to cross to get to her. He also brought her a teacher to teach her all the goodness.

Prince Zabarjad in one of his hunting trips found that castle. He was eager to cross the lake and see the castle. In order to do that he had to play tricks upon the guards, who were Satans. After tempting them with wine, he was able to get to the castle. Immediately he succeeded in kissing the girl. When her nurse came the girl lied to her, but then she confessed to her nurse that she had lied :

'Azàhîr : I lied ... Lying is evilness.
Khalùb : (astonished) : Why did you do so ... ?
'Azàhîr : I liked to exprience evil myself ...
Khalùb (crying, hitting her chest with her hand) : Woe to you ... ! It is the first time in your pure life to commit this grave sin (78).

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(78) M. Taymùr, 'Ashtar min 'Iblîs, Cairo : Dàr al Ma'arif, p.d., pp. 92-93.

She lied to experience this evil. It was a new thing. Even though she admitted that it was evil, she continued lying.

The prince was subsequently able to kidnap her and take her to his palace. She learned from him what death is ; then she drank. She saw him dancing with other women. Feeling jealous, she picked up the sword to kill the prince, but she was able only to wound him. The prince forgave her, blaming the Satans for her actions. The girl had never heard about the Satans, so she asked :

> 'Azàhîr : What do the Satans have to do with what I did ? I hit you with the sword.
>
> Zabarjad : Satans are the ones who move your hand (79).

Taymùr did an excellent job in this play. The Islamic conception of Satan and his role in the life of man was very clear in his mind. A closet drama, the play is meant to be read, not performed ; indeed, as a result of Taymùr's language, the play is difficult to stage. Believing that he was a guardian of the Arabic language. Taymùr spent a good deal of time coining new words to replace western words which the common man used.

A consideration of the secular plays makes it clear that the author did not go away from the Islamic con-

(79) M. Taymùr, 'Ashtar min 'Iblîs, p. 116.

ception of man, struggling with himself. Allah made it clear that man has complete choice : « We have created man from the union of the two sexes so that we may put him to the proof. We have endowed him with sight and hearing and, be he thankful or oblivious of our favours, We have shown him the right path » (80). Man has to choose. Even the acceptance of Satan's advice to do evil is a choice. The necessity of choosing creates the conflict in the life of man. It is, in fact, a dramatic conflict. There is a verse in the Quran which is important to mention here : « We created man to try him with afflictions » (81). Thus man who lives on Earth struggling with Satan, his fellowman and himself has the sympathy and the love of Allah, who created him and knows his burdens and frailties.

Allah defended man against the angels' charges that he was incomplete, charges made even before Allah had created man. Almighty Allah informed the angels': « I am placing on the earth one that shall rule as My deputy » (82). The angels replied, « Will You put there one that will do evil and shed blood, when we have for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name ? » (83) Allah's only answer for their question : « I know what you do not know » (84). Then man lived

(80) The Quran, 76:2-3.

(81) The Quran, 90:4.

(82) The Quran, 2:30.

(83) Ibid.

(84) Ibid.

on the Earth and did everything the angels had worried that he would do.

The commentators of the Quran referred to that conversation in their explanation of verses of the Quran to show the angels' mistaken idea about man, an idea expressed in their question to Allah when He told them that He was going to create man.

> And now that an apostle has come to them from Allah confirming their own Scriptures, some of those to whom the Scriptures were given cast off the Book of Allah behind their backs as though they know nothing and accept what the devils tell of Solomon's kingdom. Not that Solomon was an unbeliever : it is the devils who are unbelievers. They teach men witchcraft and that which was revealed to the angels Hàrùt and Màrùt in Babylon (85).

The commentators explained who Hàrùt and Màrùt were--two of the great angels who used their time only to worship Allah and who judged man's frailties in the presence of Allah. In his defense of man, Allah said to Hàrùt and Màrùt :

> « I gave man ten desires, and with them man disobeyed me ».

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(85) The Quran, 2:102.

Hàrùt and Màrùt said : « God, if You give us these desires and then send us to Earth, we will rule with justice » (86).

Antoher account mentioned that not only Hàrùt and Màrùt but all the angels spoke ill about man's deeds on Earth. There is also an account related to the prophet Muhammad, emphasizing that :

The angels said, « O God, How have You been patient with man's sins ? » He said : « I afflicted them while I exempt you from this ». They said : « If we were in their place, we would never disobey You » (87).

To show them that Allah is right (which they know). He asked them to choose any one of them to live on Earth as a man with man's desires. One account stated that two agreed to descend to Earth, but another account mentioned that three agreed to descend. The third angel, realizing that he would be under temptation, returned while the other two waited.

Bakthîr found the story suitable to theater and used it to defend man. He chose to use three angels. The first left, as one of the accounts said, and the other two remained. They found a man opposing the Queen

(86) 'Abu al Fida al Hafiz b. Kathîr, Tafsîr al Qur'àn al-Karîm (The Interpretation of the Glorious Quran), Cairo : Dàr al Sha'b, 1971, Vol. III, p. 202.

(87) Ibid.

and the evil in Babylonia, preaching the words of God. The Queen was not able to seduce him. This man stood in apposition to the angels. He welcomed the angels, who had seen and been with God, and tried to put himself in their service.

The two angels, however, committed all the sins in one day. They drank wine, committed adultery, accepted bribes, and killed a man to get his wife. They gave away the secret of the words which would enable them to rise to heaven, thereby losing the power to go back. They admitted their mistakes in condemning man.

Hàrùt : We were ignorant of the truth of man ... We believed that we understood him.

Mārùt : Explain what you said ...

Hārùt : We disapproved the bad deeds of man. Then we talked to Almighty God ... Thinking that we were better than them ... But if we know his great wisdom in man we would incline the head from shyness and pray. Our prayer for Allah in heaven would be, « Bless you, Creator of man. May you bless man » (88).

As has been made evident, Islam continues to inspire contemporary writers. Either they are confirmed

(88) 'A. 'A. Bakthîr, Hàrùt and Màrùt, Cairo : Dàr Misr Li al-Tibà'a wa al Nashr, n.d., p. 54.

believers or they only consider themselves part of Islamic society. This inspiration is proof that Islam and the Muslims have nothing against the theater, and any view which considers theater a non-Islamic art has no basic support in either Islamic religion or Muslim life. In fact, it is important for any scholar who is studying the art of theater to study Islam and to see the origin of this art within Islam and Muslim societies. The time has come to stop the legend that Islam has anything against any kind of fine art, and to look at Islam as an influential factor in the development of theater from the western influence, which started with the student educational mission to Europe.

CHAPTER 2

THE STUDENT EDUCATIONAL MISSIONS TO EUROPE. 1834 - 1944

Student missions to Europe started as early as 1815, when the first wali cgouernor of modern Egypt, Muhammad 'Alî, started them. Students who went to Europe greatly influenced Egypt's culural development. In fact there was little such development before students brought the Renaissance to Egypt. One might have expected that science and art would have emerged together in modern Egypt, but such was not the case. The rebirth of science preceded that of art because the country's goal was scientific--to support the military machine of Muhammad 'Ali. Literature and art were not included in a student's program of study abroad ; a student who explored them to satisfy curiosity or personal need did not direct his attention to theater, an art form non-existent in Egypt. Furthermore, these students were well aware of the purpose of their study abroad. They were indoctrinated with the intention which Muhammad 'Ali expressed to Puring, a representative of the British government :

I am sending to your country 'Adham Bek (second director of the school's administration), and with him fifteen students, to learn what your country has to offer them... They must become independent, learn to work with their hands, and understand manufacturing. They will discover the reason for your progress and superiority and when they have learned, they will come back to teach my people (1).

Muhammad 'Ali's words make clear that students were to acquire scientific and industrial knowledge. He inspired fear, and they adhered to his commands while in Europe.

In addition, the barrier between Egyptian and European lifestyles persisted. Students spent most of their time in one place, where they spoke Arabic or Turkish, thereby preserving eastern tradition and behavior, and they returned to Egypt as socially conservative as they had left it (2). Muhammad 'Ali feared that his students, contaminated by the revolutionary thought which spread throughout Europe after the French Revolution, would be led to compare a lagging Egypt with progressive European countries. His discipline, therefore, suppressed both political and artistic

(1) Ahmad 'Izzat 'Abd al-Karim. Tarikh al Ta'lim Fi Masr (The History of Education in Egypt), Cairo : Maktabat al Anglo, p. 423.
(2) Ibid., p. 427.

expression, and students returning from his missions did nothing to promote theater or art in general.

The only exception was Rifà'ah Rafi' al-Tàhtàwi, who already showed literary ability before he went to Paris, where he was exposed to the theater. When he returned, he expressed his great admiration for French theater in his autobiography, knowing that he was introducing a new art. As the first Arabian man to understand the technique and function of theater, he described the feeling of an experienced audience (3), thus presenting the first clear picture of theater of the Arab world. After also describing the theater building itself, he went on to discuss the value of acting. He believed that « the theater is like a general school, where the common man can learn » (4). His autobiography, *Takhlis* al 'Ibrîz 'ilà Talkhîs barîz (1834), presented the first clear picture of the theater to Egypt. His recognition of dance was especially progressive : « In Egypt dance is designed for women, in order to stimulate desire, but in Paris one doesn't sense the smell of adultery » (5). Thus Rifà'ah introduced theater to and provided the groundwork for its establishment in Egypt. More could not have been expected of him, since establishing a new theater is a collective effort, requiring not only scripts actors, directors, and designers, but also appreciative

(3) Rifà'ah Ràfi al-TahtàWi **Takhlis al Ibrîz ila** Talkis barîz, Cairo, al Hay'ah, 1956, p. 165.

(4) Ibid., p. 166.

(5) Al-Tahtàwi, p. 161.

audiences. After his book was published in 1834, there was no concern with theater in Egypt until 1868.

In that year the Khedive 'Ismà'il, one of the students who had been educated in Europe, ordered the establishment of the al-'Azbakiyya Theater 1868 and of the opera in 1869. His decision was, no doubt, partially influenced by his studies in Europe. Although it was within his power to bring about the building of the two theaters, producing a national resident company to perform in them proved beyond his individual capability. Touring European companies performed both theater and opera, but an independent theater had yet to emerge.

What the Khedive contributed to the realization of such an independent theater was his decision to build al-'Azbakiyya and the Opera. Their very existence and the positive reception given to European companies by Egyptian audiences inspired Ya'qùb Sannù' to found his own company in 1870, which performed for two seasons and for which he wrote thirty-two plays (6). Between 1842 and 1843, Sannù' had been sent to Livorne in Italy to receive his early education, sponsored by Prince 'Ahmad Pasha Yakan, the grandson of Muhammad 'Ali, rather than by the government (7). Three years later,

(6) Seven of these plays have been published. See Muhammad Yusuf Naim, al Masrah al 'Arabi, Beirut : Dàr al Thaqàfa, 1963.

(7) Philip de Tarrazi, Tarikh al Sahafa al 'Arabiyya (The History of Arabic Journalism), Beirut, al Matba'a al Adahiyya, 1913. Vol. III, p. 283.

at the age of sixteen, he returned to Egypt. His youth may have prevented his completely comprehending theater, but, since he was clever, the European environment must have attuned him to theater to the extent that he recognized theatrical art when he saw it, in school activities at the very least. Over the years, he continued to read about theater and to make frequent visits to Europe, where he attended performances.

By forming his own company, he in turn inspired Salîm al-Naqqâsh's moving from Syria to Egypt and founding a new company (8), which was well received by European-educated Egyptian students. There was as yet, however, no inclination on the part of these students to strike out on their own and attempt to write for or about theater.

However, at this time a new element entered the picture, the growing bourgeoisie who sent their children to Europe at their own expense, thereby terminating the government's exclusive role. At the same time, patronage began to determine the government's choice of students to be sent abroad, so that by 1886 « there were no more than twenty-four government students and more than fifty private students (9). Furthermore,

> On October 23, 1888, legislation halted the funding of new students until the number of government students abroad was reduced to ten. Thereafter,

(8) 'Al-Ahràm, Cairo, December 16, 1876.
(9) 'Abd al-Karàm, p. 267.

two students per year would be sent on condition that the money otherwise sent for study abroad would be used to support the progress of education in Egypt (10).

This new generation of students was more at liberty to experience European life than its predecessors had been. Cultural development which had taken place in Cairo in the interim enabled them to accept the avant garde, both in Parisian society and in other European countries. They attended all kinds of theaters and, not having previously been exposed to such splendid acting, greatly admired the theater. Although at first they disliked operatic music, 'Ahmad Shafîq Pasha, referring to one opera, commented : « The scenes and the actors' songs and movements flowed gently, but most wonderful was an actress who danced on the tips of her toes » (11). Plays they had seen in Cairo they saw again in Paris — Moliere's *Tartuffe,* translated as *Sheikh Matlûf* (the spoiled Sheikh), and Shakespeare's *Othello, Hamlet,* and *Romeo and Juliet.*

The performances of Sarah Bernhardt and other European actors who visited Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century captured the attention of the Egyptians in Paris. So overwhelming was the French theater that 'Ahmad Shafiq Pàsha stated that the magnificent of the play in harmony with the accompanying

(10) 'Abd al-Karîm, p. 267.

music caused him to enjoy the music even though he found it unfamiliar. In the same play, he described his reaction to the portrayal of the 1870 battle of Sedan France and Germany :

> I felt as if I were in the midst of the battle ; I saw the skies, the planted fields and the deserted houses ; I gazed upon destroyed castles, and found myself among the wounded soldiers and the fire of the machine guns (2).

He paid close attention to the details of the performances, particularly to elocution. Headmired actors who «pronounced their words perfectly, so that the audience always understood them » (13).

From 'Ahmad Shafiq Pasha's comment, we know that study abroad could prepare Egyptians to be excellent audiences. However, until that time no student had devoted himself to the art of theater, either by studying it or by writing for it. The one exception was 'Ahmad Shawqi, later known as 'Amir al Shura (Prince of Poets) , who wrote a play, *'Ali Bek al-kabir*, wich he dedicated to Khedive Tawfiq and sent to him from France. The Khedive disliking the idea of his poet's turning playwright, did not encourage Shawqi, who wrote nothing further for the theater until 1926, after he had become estranged from the court and had drawn

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(12) Shafiq Pasha p. 331.
(13) Ibid., p. 334.

closer to the people. He then resumed writing poetical plays (14).

The European-educated Egyptian's lack of involvement in the theater is not difficult to explain. Basically, there are four reasons for it :

1. Since these students were expected to work in the government, art was not a priority.
2. Students were not able to confront a society which looked askance at a profession in the arts and considered journalists and actors to be outcasts.
3. Theater, as a profession, could not provide a livelihood, thus discouraging the intellectual elite.
4. The press very rarely covered theater, except for advertisement, until 1898 (15).

The seeds sown by the new generation of Stu. dents developed slowly, but growth is clearly seen, especially in translation. Most translators came from the ranks of students educated in Europe, among whom where Ismà'il 'Asim, who graduated from the Sorbonne. and 'Ibràhîm Ramzi al-Fayyùmi, (16) who studied in

(14) Muhammad Mandùr, A'làm al Shi'r al 'Arabi al Hadîth, Beirut· Al Maktab al Tujari, Li al-Tibâ'a wa al Nashr, 1970, p. 71.

(15) Among the first to write about the theory of drama was Niqula Haddàd in 1888 ; see « al Tamthîl wa Falsafat t'athîruî » (The Art of Acting and the Philosophy of its Effect), Al-Thurayya, Vol. 6, August 1898.

(16) I have joined al-Fayyùmi to Ibràhîm Ramzi's name to differentiate him from another, playwright of the same name. Ibrahîm Ramzi was born in al-Fayyùm in 1854.

London. In addition, growth can be seen in the government's interest in creating an Arabic theater. Such interest resulted in the 1904 decision to finance the first journey of a student to Paris specifically for the purpose of studying theater (17). After his return in 1910, this student, George 'Abyad, led the Egyptian theatrical movement.

Careful examination of two accounts of events prior to 'Abyad's leaving for Europe reveals their significance. The first, found in the June 11, 1904 issue of the newspaper *al-'Ahràm*, states :

> Mr. George Afandi 'Abyad, with some of his fellow actors, will perform the play « Great Tower » in French next Saturday night at the Zizinya Theatre. The work will be under the auspices of His Royal Highness, the Khedive, in recognition of 'Abyad's great zeal for his art. The proceeds of the evening will enable him to study theatrical art in Europe, after which he plans to return and establish a school of drama in Egypt, an aim which has drawn praise from the Khedive. We wish Mr. 'Abyad good luck in attracting patrons so as to make the realization of his goals possible (18).

The second account, the biography of George 'Abyad written by his daughter Su'àd, details his background and clarifies events leading up to his study in Europe.

(17) Su'àd Abyad, George 'Abyad, Cairo : Dàr al Ma'àrif, 1970, p. 71
(18) 'Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 1973, June 11, 1904.

'Abyad first began to act with a student group from St. Mark's College in Alexandria in 1903. Prompted by this experience, he wrote to Khedive 'Abbàs Hilmi, asking for financial assistance to study theater in Europe. Receiving no reply, he then invited the Khedive to attend a performance. The Khedive eventually did so, and the occasion afforded him an opportunity to observe and evaluate the potential of the persistent 'Abyad, who succeeded not only in impressing the Khedive but also in convincing him that his financial assistance would be worthwhile and important. Events moved rapidly following the performance of « Great Tower ». 'Abyad was introduced to 'Ahmad Shafîq Pasha, Director of the Office of the Khedive, with whom he arranged travel plans and, on July 29, 1904, 'Abyad left for France (19).

In both of these accounts, three significant facts emerge about this important stage in the development of a native Egyptian theater. The first is evidence of an increasing interest in theater among Egyptian students, which for some later developed into a lifetime professional pursuit. 'Abyad played a particularly crucial role in developing such interest. Attempts to discount the importance of 'Abyad's contribution to Egyptian theater have been made on the basis of his being Syrian rather than Egyptian. However, prior to leaving for France, he had spent five years in Egypt, and

(19) Su'àd 'Abyad, pp. 71-74.

it was during that time, in an atmosphere shared with Egyptians who dreamed of drama as he did, that his talent emerged and was shaped. Since dreams are based not on the impossible but on the possible, 'Abyad's ideals were commonly held among a growing number of students who aspired to theatrical careers. For them, as for 'Abyad, the possible from which their dreams originated was the reality of Egypt. 'Abyad had, after all, not performed « Great Tower » by himself ; the production was developed with and through interaction with Egyptians.

The second fact, dual in nature, which emerges is that the Khedive and the intellectual elite which surrounded him, almost all of whom had studied in Europe themselves, appreciated European theater. The Khedive's decision to attend the performance of « Great Tower » symbolized the Egyptian government's commitment to Egyptianize theater. His presence stated not only that the government intended, as proof of its commitment, to assist in sending someone abroad, but also that 'Abyad, because of his strong motivation and his potential to enrich his chosen profession, should be that person.

The third fact to be considered is the growing interest of the Egyptian press in theater, an interest which mirrored society's growing awareness of the need to send someone to study European theatrical art. This awareness is clearly shown in *al-'Ahràm's* expressed hope for the success of 'Abyad's performance.

George 'Abyad returned to Egypt in 1910, but he did not immediately establish the school of drama he had promised. On his return he was accompanied by a French-speaking company. He thus disappointed those who had expected him to play a leading role in creating a uniquely Egyptian theater and failed, temporarily, to fulfill the expectations he had raised six years earlier. It was only when Saad Zaghlùl, Minister of Education, specifically asked 'Abyad to establish a company for Arabic performances (20) that Abyad did so, in 1912 (21). With the formation of an Arabic-speaking troupe, a new era in theater commenced.

'Abayd's great ability as an actor attracted more and more Egyptians to theater, and many other gifted men played significant roles in the growth and refinement of the profession. With this increase in talented participants, 'Abyad was no longer regarded as the sole leader in the theater. The Egyptian theatrical movement stengthened daily, in fused with new blood. How ever, 'Abyad's productions in Arabic theater spanned a period of more than fifty years, with his greatest contributions being made during the initial three years (1912 to 1915),), and the new company's repertoire included the best in both classical and romantic drama.

Most important, however, were the productions of indigenous plays : « Misr al-Jadîda wa Misr al-Qadîma »

(20) Su'àd Abyad, p. 115.
(21) Ibid., p. 117.

(The New and Old Egypt), « Banàt al-Shawàri' wa Banàt al-Madàris » (Street Girls and School Girls), and « Salàh al-Dîn al-'Ayyùbi ». The author of these was Farah 'Antùn, a Syrian who immigrated to Egypt in 1897 and whose association with 'Abyad's company and whose plays brought the troupe fame.

'Antùn established in Cairo a magazine called al-Jàmi'a. For over three years he expressed little appreciation of theater until he wrote an article (1902) entitled « The Philosopher Bacon and the Poet Shakespeare » (22). In 1905 he immigrated to America, where his stay was brief, and returned to Egypt in 1906. Sources provide little information on his activities in America, although some say that he went to earn mony (23). *Al-Hilal* opened that « he immigrated to the United States to work as a journalist and while he was there published *al-Jami'a* daily, weekly and monthly » (24). Regardless of his motivation for going to America or his activities while there, it is clear that he lived in New York, the center of drama in the United States. Although not having gone specifically to study, Antùn, being unhampered and having free time, examined the art of theater closely. When he returned to Egypt in 1906, his outlook had totally changed. He ceased to publish his magazine and, in other journals,

(22) Farah Antùn, « Al Faylasùf Bacon wa al Shà'ir Shakespeare », al-Jami'a, Cairo, Vol. 6, 1902.

(23) See Marùn Abbùd, Judud wa Qudma', (New and Old). Beirut, Dàr al Thakàfa, 1963, p. 273.

(24) Farah Antùn, al-Hilàl, Cairo, Vol. 1, October 1' 1922' p. 66.

began immediately to write about theater. His article entitled « 'Insha' al-Riwàyàt wa Anfa'uha lana » (The composition of plays and which kind of play is useful for us) is considered one of the best on Egyptian theater.

When George 'Abyad organized his company in 1921, he desperately needed transltors and, for 'Antùn, the time was ripe to dedicate himself to the theater. « Oedipus, » the first play performed by 'Abyad's company, was translated by 'Antùn and constituted a milestone as an honest translation. Soon after that, he wrote one of his greatest plays, « Misr al-Jadîda wa Misr al-Qadîma » (The New and Od Egypt), a landmark in Egyptian drama which opened a new era. Moreover, the play sparked critied comment as no Egyptian play had done until that time (25). Until his death in 1922, (26) 'Antùn continued to write, translate, and adapt western plays, operas and operettas for the Egyptian stage.

American's role in influencing 'Antùn's attitudes toward theater was recognized by his contemporary, who played a significant role in the development of Egyptian theater. Taymùr spent four years in Europe, one studying medicine in Germany and three in France reading law. Since he spent the major portion of his time reading about theater and attending performances, he achi-

(25) See the criticism written on the play in al-Jarida, Vol. 1848, April 9, 1913, and Misr, Vol. 5131, April 12, 1913.

(26) Farah 'Antùn, al-Hilàl, Vol. 1, October, 1, 1922.

eved little success in his studies and returned to Egypt for a visit in 1914. He was unable, because of the outbreak of World War 1, to return to France. Although he then attempted to study agriculture as his family wished, his interest in theater also prevented his success in that field. Finding it impossible to satisfy his family, he decided instead to please himself and so devoted himself to the theater (27). His major works were written during the period from 1917 to 1921, and his plays « 'Usfùr Fi al-Qafas » (A Sparrow in the Cage) and 'Abd al-Sattàr 'Afandi » and « al-Hawiya » (The Abyss) are considered the first relevant to the Egyptian social scene. His articles comprise the first analysis in Arabic of the types and trends of drama ; although not especially scholarly in the modern sense, they did attempt to explore the foundations of theater. He also tried, through constructive criticism of older methods of acting, to disseminate knowledge of modern techniques. Taymùr's hope to see a fully developed Egyptian theater ended with his premature death in 1921 (28). Although he was active in the Egyptian theaterical movement for less than five years, he provided immensely valuable stimulus and inspiration.

Many other students were also attracted to the theater while studying in Europe. One such was

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(72) Zaki Tulaymàt in the Introduction, Muhammad Taymùr's Works Cairo : al Hay'a al Masriyya al 'Amma, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 19.

(28) Mahmùd Taymùr in the Introduction, Muhammad Taymùr's Works, Cairo : Al Hay'a al Masriyya al 'Amma, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 19.

Muhammad 'Abu Tayla, who spent four years in Germany attending performances « of more than 150 plays — both those presented in Berlin's largest theaters and those found in the smallest outskirts, ranging from comedy to tragedy, from opera to operetta » (29). His writings attempted to familiarize the Egyptian public with Schiller and Goethe.

At this point theater groups formed by those who had studied abroad began to emerge, among them that of Mahmùd Mùràd, who founded a theatrical company in al-Sa'ïdiyya School. This development pleased the Ministry of Educattion, which issued a statement on November 6, 1922, approving the establishment of such troupes, on the condition that the decision to join be made by both student and guardian (30). This expression of support reinforced society's acceptance of theater and also led to government sponsorship of Mùràd's trip to Europe. The government's intention was to have Muràd examine Europe's theatrical world and select what would be suitable and useful for adaptation to the Egyptian theater. Upon his return, Muràd urged the government to establish an institute of theater and music which, he felt, would constitute a major step in making theater a normal facet of Egyptian artistic life. His goal was supported by 'Abd al-Rahmàn Rushdi, a young lawyer who was the first intelletual to work as an actor and who founded his own company in 1917.

(29) Majallat al Masrah, Cairo, Vol. I, November 1, 1925.

(30) Mahmùd, Muràd « Taqrir an el musiqa wa al tamthil ila wazir al m'àrif » al report about music and acting to the Minister of Education), Majellat al Funùn, Cairo, Vol. 3, August 5, 1923.

There were other Egyptian who, like Muràd, had an intense interest in theater and who, lacking government support, travelled to Europe on their own initiative specifically to study theater. One such was Yùsif Wahbi, who in 1921 attended a school of elocution and acting in Italy. Although this particular fact is disputed, the essential point is that he did go to Europe expressly to study theater and was accompanied by 'Aziz 'Id, a well-known actor and director. Wahbi « as much as possible exposed himself to the European theater and, at the same time, was planning to establish a theater for Egyptian acting » (41). Among others who also went to Europe were 'Istifàn Rusti, who performed quite successfully with a troupe in Paris, and Najîb al-Rayhàni.

Theater critics, knowing what Europe could offer to Egyptian theater, then began to insist that the government « send artistic missions for specialized study of the European theatrical system so that upon their return they could assist in raising the standards of the Egyptian theater » (32). This pressure resulted in the government's sponsoring one very talented actor, Zaki Tulaymàt, in 1924.

Tawfiq al-Hakim was another member of the later generation of young Egyptians who experienced Europe.

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(31) Al Teatro, Cairo, Vol. 2, November 1924.

(32) Subhi, Kawkab al Sharq, Cairo, Vol. 162, March 27, 1925.

He is a pivotal Egyptian playwright, and his plays were already being performed in Egypt in 1924 (albeit by a second-class troupe) while he was a law student. In 1927 he went to Europe to read law andthere,in contrast with Muhammad Taymùr, managed to strike a balance between his love for theater and his love for law. There can be no doubt, however, that his being in Europe resulted in a greater theatrical emphasis, theredy yielding more enrichment of theater than law. Al-Hàkîm returned to Egypt in 1929 and published (1933) his first serious play, « 'Ahl al Kahf (The Cave men), which was well received (33). With « 'Ahl al Kahf » Egyptian theater came of age and began to give to the theatrical world rather than merely take from it.

Rather than weaving the Quranic subject matter into a conflict between man and fate as the Greek tragedians had done, Al-Hakîm fabricated instead a struggle between man and time — that, apparently, being the greater problem in Egypt when the play was written. In changing the nature of the conflict,he gave the play a uniquely Egyptian outlook and, regardless of critics comments, there was consensus that with « Ahl al Kahf » Egyptian tragedy was born. (See pp. 32-38 of Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of « Ahl al Kahf »).

Interestingly, the director of the play's first performance was Tulaymàt, who had returned from France

(33) Taha Husayn, al Majmu'a al Kàmila Li, a'màl Taha Husyn. Beirut : Dàr al-'Adàb, 1967, Vol. 5, pp. 415-435.

in 1930. Immediately after his arrival, Tulaymàt established a school of drama, in which endeavor he was suppoted by George 'Abyad and other intellectuals. The school, however, closed shortly afterwards, but Tulaymàt never ceased working to have it re-opened. Finally, in 1944 his efforts were rewarded, this success owing primarily to the numerous intellectuals who had studied in Europe and supported Tulaymàt. This school aided tremendously in making theater a normal facet of Egyptian life. Tulaymàt's graduates constituted the first group of students to go to Europe on what became regular of government missions, and today they comprise the leading scholars of the Egyptian theatrical movement. This school also provided the foundation for the Academy of Arts, the final recognition of both the government and society at large of the importance of theater, and the graduates of the school succeeded in establishing the art of theater throughout Egypt and the Arab world.

In conclusion, it may be said that the various student missions to Europe contributed to the development of Egyptian theater in the following ways :

— they helped establish the foundation for Egyptian theater in the Arab world, especially Egypt ;

— they created an audience which valued theater and was intimately connected with it :

— they helped eliminate the stigma attached to theater, which then became a respectable pro-

fession and one to which many intellectuals aspired ;

- they nurtured an intellectual renaissance supportive of theater and, as a result, the formerly haphazard study of theater became a scholarly endeavor ;
- they encouraged many to write plays and theatrical criticism ; and
- they strongly influenced Egyptian theater by creating the ground for the foreign companies to succeed in Egypt and give live examples of theater.

CHAPTER 3

EUROPEAN THEATRICAL COMPANIES, 1870 - 1923

European theatrical companies came to Egypt as early as 1869, and, although their visits were interrupted by World War 1, their theatrical productions in Egypt have continued to the present. Most of these companies, or troupes, seem to have enjoyed great success, with the exception of the British (1) and American companies which came to Egypt in 1882 (2).

The 'Azbakiyya Theater, the first Egyptian theater built to accommodate foreign companies, was erected in 1868. This theater was thought to be too small for the large foreign audiences expected for the opening of the Suez Canal. Therefore, the Khedive 'Ismà'îl gave orders to build a larger theater, and as a result the Cairo Opera House was erected in 1869. Subsequently, many more theaters were built in Cairo and Alexandria to receive foreign touring companies. These included the

(1) As a protest against British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the Egyptians boycotted all performances by British groups.
(2) Al-'Ahràm (Alexandria), Vol. 1, 11.9.1882.

Paradiso, Politama, and 'Abbas theaters in Cairo, and the Zizinia and al-Hambara theaters in Alexandria. Stimulated by the public response to foreign theatrical productions, local companies were formed and also performed in these theaters.

The success enjoyed by these original foreign companies caused other foreign nations to send their talented companies to Egypt. Companies from many different nations, such as France, Italy, Greece, Armenia, (3) and Great Britain, came to Egypt either by direct contractual agreement with the Cairo Opera or by arrangements made through foreign agencies.

Money was, of course, a motive, but it was by no means the only reason for the presence of these foreign theatrical companies in Egypt. Another reason was the brisk competition among many European countries, especially France, Italy, and Great Britain, to expand their cultures abroad. Theater was an important tool for accomplishing this purpose. The competition was at first strongest between France and Italy, but later, when England occupied Egypt in 1882, she also took part in this competition. England sent an Anglo-American company, (4) but it failed to draw crowds. There is no mention of British theatrical companies in Egyptian

(3) The audiences of the Greek and Armenian companies were composed mainly of Greek and Armenian immigrants. Few Egyptians ever attended these performances, as they were not considered first class productions.

(4) Al-'Ahrâm, Vol. 1, 11.9.1882.

periodicals until 1901 (5). The failure of the British ultimately served to confine theatrical competition to the French and Italians.

The success of the Italian companies was assured when Verdi composed *Aida* specifically for performance in Cairo. The Khedive 'Isma'îl had asked Verdi to write this opera to be performed for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Verdi finished it two years later, and it was performed in 1871.

The Egyptian press gave much attention to the Italian companies, even going so far to publish free advertisements of their activities. In 1881, al-'Ahràm published an unusual article about the Italian actor Ernest Russini prior to his performance at Alexandria. This article deserves comment, since it asked the Arab people to support the show on the grounds that it would prove informative, especially since Italian was the language of the common people (6). This request is somewhat confusing, for it did not mean to imply that most of the people of Alexandria were Italian, but rather that the majority of the foreigners there were Italian. More interesting is the fact that the Italian community in Alexandria in the nineteenth century was the largest foreign community in Egypt. However, the success of Italian companies in Alexandria alone could not guarantee their survival in Egypt as a whole. They had to succeed in Cairo also, since the Majority of the Cairene audiences were educated, aristocratic Egyptians, not

(5) Al-Muqattam, Cairo, Vol. 2312, 12.11.1901.

(6) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 1017, 1.12.1881.

foreigners. The second language of these people was usually French or English, rarely Italian.

In spite of concentrated effort, the Italians retreated before the success of the French companies. The success of the French was due not only to the expansion of their language in Egypt but also to the tremendous progress and refinement of French theater at that time. Furthermore, France sent only her finest companies to Egypt.

One of the foremost of these French companies was that of the famous actor Koklan. The Egyptian press gave him high praise, heralding his arrival thirteen days in advance (7). An article in *al-'Ahràm* stated, « He is the brightest star on the theatrical horizon. He is an actor with an unusual and perfect style who can turn the hearts of his audience as he wishes » (8). Another article in the same newspaper noted, «He is not only the first actor in the world but also a knowledgeable writer with a distinctive style » (9).

There were sixteen anonymous artictes in *al-'Ahràm* about Koklan during the thirteen days prior to his arrival in Cairo. This was the largest number of articles written about any theatrical company or actor. They showed that French theater, of which Koklan's company was representative, was more highly developed than

(7) Al-'Ahràm ; articles concerning Koklan appeared continuously from 14.1.1888 until 26.1.1888

(8) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 3017, 25.1.1888.

(9) Al-Ahràm, Vol. 3029, 27.1.1888.

that of any other country. The admiration of the Egyptian audiences for Koklan was overwhelming. They offered him baskets of flowers (10), and the Khedive Tawfîq received him at the palace, a great compliment to his art (11).

The reception the Egyptians gave Koklan showed their interest in the theater and, at the same time, gave impetus to the neophyte Egyptian theater. Koklan inspired young Egyptian actors, for they naturally desired the same respect from their countrymen that Koklan had received. Koklan's inspiring them to develop their talents was in itself a contribution to the creation of an Egyptian theater of high artistic quality.

In 1905, seventeen years after his first visit, Koklan revisited Egypt (12). He performed in both Cairo and Alexandria and was, very likely, received with even more enthusiasm than before. The newspaper *al-Muqattam* reviewed his return performances (13). It is interesting to note the difference between the first articles, printed in *al-'Ahram* in 1888, and those appearing in the periodicals in 1905. The later articles show the progress made in developing truly objective theatrical criticism.

Koklan's second visit was one factor encouraging certain Egyptian writers to look more closely at their own native companies. This critical analysis induced

(10) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 3696, 17.11.1888.
(11) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 3031, 30.1.1888.
(12) Al Muqattam, Vol. 4859, 22.3.1905.
(13) Ibid.

them to demand improvements in acting methodology, using Koklan as one of the paragons. When Koklan died in 1909, Egyptians mourned his passing. 'Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid, an exponent of Egyptian liberalism, wrote an eulogy in which he called Koklan's death a grievous misfortune to theatrical art. In the same article, he emphasized the value of theater in the universal society and Egypt's need for this art (14).

Koklan wasn't the only foreign actor to receive recognition and tribute in Egypt. There were other « greats » who came, such as Miss Frenden, (15) Sarah Bernhardt, and Sylvain. The Egyptians showed their admiration and respect for these performers in many ways. The most remarkable welcome was given to Sarah Bernhardt during her 1908 visit to Egypt. One evening as she left her hotel for her scheduled performance, a group of waiting college students insisted on pulling her car to the opera (16). This was her second visit to Egypt, the first having been in 1888 (17). She noted the remarkable development in audience appreciation since her previous visit. In 1888, the audience had primarily been comprised of the rich and highly educated who came for the joy of theatrical art. However, in 1908 the audiences were more mature and understood

(14) Al-Jarîda (Cairo), Vol. 500, 30.1.1909.
(15) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 1307, 24.1.1882.
(16) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 3296, 17.12.1888.
(17) Muhaddith (The Speaker), « Sarah Bernhardt in Egypt », Jarīdat al-Akhbar (Cairo), Vol. 247, 11.12.1908.

the value of theatrical art as well as the greatness of Sarah (18). In fact, Sarah was well known to Egyptians before her first visit. In 1880, Qayser zieneh, editor of *al-'Ahràm wrote* « Sarah Bernhardt and the Art of Theater, » (19) one of the first articles about theater. In this essay he praised her highly and extolled her as a model of theatrical art. He expressed the hope that Egyptian actors would study her methods, try to imitate her, and share her phenomenal enthusiasm for the theater.

The visits of Sarah Bernardt and Koklan, pillars of the art of theater in France, firmly established theater as an extremely important element in expanding French culture in Egypt. This was clearly evident from both audience and press reaction to the French companies which came to Egypt annually. There was no mention in Egyptian publications of second or thirdrate French theatrical companies. It was clear, however, that Italian companies vacillated in artistic quality. The French companies, the first among foreign companies, were, in the opinion of Egyptians, the unchallenged masters of theater.

It was a logical consequence, therefore, that when Egypt in 1904 sent its first mission to Europe to learn the art of theater, France was chosen. The person chosen for this mission was George Abyad, who learned

(18) Muhaddith, « Sarah Bernhardt in Egypt, » 11/12/1908.
(19) Al-'Ahràm, Vol. 203, 2.1.1880.

French drama under the supervision of Sylvain, (20) an actor well known to Egyptian audiences. When George Abyad returned from France in 1910, he performed in some of the same plays in which Sylvain had excelled during his 1904 visit to Egypt. Among them were « Louis XI, » (21) « The Hunchback, » and « Othello » (22). Egyptians were familiar with these plays since they had been performed not only by Sylvain but also by many other French actors such as Sarah Bernhardt and Koklan.

It is interesting to note that many of the plays which foreign companies had performed from 1869, the date of the establishment of the Cairo Opera, to 1923 were translated into Arabic. The works of world-famous dramatists such as Shakespeare, Corneille, Racine, Moliere, Victor Hugo, and Victorien Sardou were performed in Arabic by Egyptian companies, whereas they had previously been performed by foreign companies. It is clear that the foreign companies, especially the French, were the models and forerunners of Egyptian theater.

Although critics attacked George 'Abyad in 1912 because they felt he had not achieved the same level of art as the French, (23) it cannot be overlooked that

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(20) Su'ād 'Abyad, George 'Abyad (Cairo : Dàr al-Ma'àrif, 1970), p. 91.

(21) **Al-Muqattam**, Vol. 7149, 10/2/1912.

(22) Al-Raqîb (Cairo, Vol. 20, 4.2.1912 and Vol. 26, 4.12.1912

(23) Muhammad Kamàl Haggàgi, « The Art of Acting and George Abyad, al-Raqib, Vol. 43, 4.21.1912.

George 'Abyad and his company contributed greatly to the development of Egyptian theater and the progress of Arabic drama. During this period the Egyptian government began to encourage and in some instances subsidize local companies. The government encouraged these companies, not because it understood the real message of theatrical art but because support of local theatrical companies added to its prestige and provided amusement for the aristocratic classes, whose members were also very influential in government. Although a great deal of money was invested, no serious steps were taken to establish a national theater. The cost of performing the opera *Aida,* for instance, was outrageous : more than 550,000 francs were spent for wigs alone, and 150,000 francs were paid to the composer, Verdi. In other instances, actresses received as much as 1100 Egyptian pounds monthly, in addition to awards and gifts of valuable jewels. When Frenden visited Egypt in 1882, an *al-'Ahràm* article stated that one aristocrat had presented her with a valuable ring. Princess 'Aîn al-Hayàt gave her two priceles necklaces, and Princess Nazli presented her with a costly gold medal (24)..

Even though theater was viewed as an aristocratic amusement by the majority of Egyptian people, they began to attend the theater. Soon they realized the difference between it and other amusements, such as singing and belly dancing. For the Egyptian masses,

(24) Salàh Tantàwi, The Eminence of Theater (Cairo : The Records of Opera,1933), p. 11. The Records were destroyed when the Cairo Opera Houseburned in 1971 ; I had examined them in 1964.

theater acted as a soothing balm to the irritations and a release from the anxieties and problems of everyday existence. It gave them a chance to understand and give rein to their emotions, if only temporarily. Soon the general public was enthusiatically acclaiming the art of theater.

Seeing this acceptance and realizing its import, Ya'qùb Sannù', (25) an Egyptian Jew, established the first Arabic theater in Egypt. This theater further expanded audiences so that they included people from the many and varied social classes of Egyptian society. It also led to the need for Egyptianizing the art of theater. The upsurge of interest in Egyptian theater led to the founding of the Shàmi's Company in Egypt in 1876, an Arab company which imitated the acting and dramatic style of the foreign companies. Little original Arabic drama emerged at this time, with the exception of the works of 'Abu Khalîl al-Qabbàni, a Syrian, who tried to imitate the European classical authors. He chose his subjects from Arabian folk tales and mixed his plays with songs. He never succeeded in writing even a nearly perfect play, but he did succeed in attracting the people's attention. This attention and interest encouraged more native playwrights and furthered the development of the art. Another example from this trial period was a play by Ibràhîm Ramzi al-Fayyùmi called *al-Mu'tamid b. 'Abbàd* (1892), with a theme taken from the history

(25) See Muhamad Yùsuf Najm, al Masrahiyya fi al-'Adab al 'Arabi (Beirut Dàr al-Thaqàfa, 1967), pp. 77-91, and Ibràhîm 'Abu Naddra (Cairo: al-Matba'a Namuthajiyya, 1953).

of the Arabs in Spain. In 1906, Farah 'Antùn wrote another historical play entitled *Salah al-Din and the Kingdom of Jerusalem.*

All these plays were imitations of those performed by the French companies, since they performed primarily historical plays. Egyptian writers did not deviate from historical themes until 1913, when they began to see the need to work with local themes. Young, educated Egyptians were calling for the liberation of Egypt from foreign influence and domination. Farah 'Antùn wrote *Misr al-Jadîda* (The new Egypt), the first play aimed at achieving this purpose. Egyptian critics and politicians welcomed it and hailed it as the first Egyptian social drama. Later it was discovered that *Misr al-Jadîda* closely paralleled *Nana* by the French novelist Emile Zola. Muhammad Taymùr, the man who had helped create local Egyptian theater, attacked it violently for its closeness to Zola's novel. By any method of evaluation, however, this play has proved to be a landmark in Arabic theater : it showed that the foreign companies had planted the seed of theater in Egypt and that the seed had germinated and was now bearing fruit.

The first artistically successful plays with local backgrounds were written and performed in 1918. Muhammad Taymùr gave Egyptian theater three plays with themes from middle-class life : *'Usfùr Fi al-Qafas*

(26) Muhammad Taymùr, Hayàtuna al-Tamthiliyya (our Theatrical Life (Cairo · al-i'timad Press, 1922).

'Abd al-Sattàr 'Afandi, and *al-Hàwiya* (26). Paradoxically, the foreign companies tried their talents in these local plays. Foreign critics often accompanied the foreign companies and wrote criticism for the local press in their native languages. One of these was Monsieur Phillipi, who harshly criticized the quality of the plays performed by the foreign companies (27). When Egyptian audiences, who also knew these foreign languages, read these criticisms, they were helped to appraise their local plays with deeper insight. All this helped the Egyptians to regard the theater as a true art form and profession. Egyptian actors also went to view foreign companies in Europe to learn from them. Furthermore, it was not unusual at this time for the same play to be performed simultaneously by both foreign and local companies. Some actors even worked in foreign companies to perfect their art. George Abyad, for instance, played in *The Great Tower* company with a group of French-speaking Egyptian students from St. Mark's College. Khedive 'Abbàs attended this performance and was very impressed ; this performance was largely responsible for sending 'Abyad to France to study theater.

Through these years of the infancy and maturation of Egyptian theater, educated Egyptians realized the tremendous importance of theater as a tool for political and social reform. Two educated Egyptian actors, 'Abd al-Rahman Rushdi and Fu'àd Salîm, who had learned their trade with foreign companies, were the first to un-

(27) Salàh Tantàwi, p. 11.

derstand the power of theater in influencing society. They made it their duty and life's work to help develop Egyptian theater to a level equal to international standards.

Even when Egypt established its own national theater, neither Egyptian's interest in foreign companies nor their respect for them diminished. Their feelings are typified by something which occurred during World war 1, a time when Egyptian theatrical companies took within their folds many foreign actors stranded in Egypt because of the war. These actors numbered more than seventy (28). The respect for foreign companies and their encouragement encompass the whole period of theater in Egypt from 1869 to 1923. Because few derogatory words were ever written about these foreign companies, one derisive article, written by an anonymous writer, stands out. In it the author asked the government to prohibit foreign companies because they did not present Egyptian art. Also, he stated that foreign companies gained monetarily from and exploited Egypt. He claimed that this money was needed and would be put to better use if foreign companies were ostracized. He further claimed that the acceptance of foreign companies fostered the propaganda of France and Italy (29).

The ramifications of this article were not the ones desired by its author. Foreign companies were firmly implanted in Egyptian's favor and esteem. Egyptians

(28) **Majallat al-Masrah** (Cairo), Vol. 1, October 1925.

(29) **Majallat al-Masrah**, Vol. 1, October 1925.

considered these foreign companies as the mentors of Egyptian authors, actors, and critics. Througnout the history of theater in Egypt, respect, admiration and homage were given to foreign companies. Otherwise, Egyptian theatrical art might never have been born or developed to its present degree of excellence.

Furthermore, the foreign theatrical companies were responsible for introducing Shakespeare to a vast audience — authors, actors, directors — who had had no chance to see performances of his plays in Europe. Those who saw Shakespeare on stage tried to imitate him in the Arabic language. By translating or imitating Shakespeare, Arabic authors went beyond merely introducing him to help in creating Arabic poetic drama.

CHAPTER 4

SHAKESPEARE IN EGYPT

1870 - 1971

Shakespearean plays were first introduced to Egypt in the 1870's by performances of visiting European companies. (See Chapter 3). The principal works performed were *Antony and Cleopatra, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet,* and *Macbeth.* Central to most of these plays is a legend expressing feelings and emotions common to all men. With their power to give expression to these feelings and to transmit folk values and beliefs, these legends have retained their meaning, from generation to generation, and from place to place. While a legend has a universal scope, it also has a special personal meaning for each individual.

The bitterness of these plays stirred the imagination of the Egyptians. Rather than finding these bittersweet legends strange, they identified with them. Critics and audiences alike welcomed the plays and encouraged the companies performing them. Egyptian theaterical criticism began to emerge with Shakespearean plays, and at the same time work began on the

translation and Egyptianization of Shakespeare's works.

Egyptians saw renowned European actors and actresses perform in the most popular Shakespearean tragedies. Their highly esteemed performances gave momentum to the translation and Egyptianization of these plays and their subsequent perfomance by Egyptian companies. The admiration the Egyptians had for these plays did not stem so much from their understanding of Shakespeare or of theatrical art as from their identification with the spirit and themes of the plays, for the dramatic action stirred their passions and overwhelmed their emotions.

The intense dramatic action of Shakespearean tragedy was not new to the Egyptians, inasmuch as it was akin to what they had experienced for centuries in their traditional folk legends. The epic tales of al-Muhalhil, 'Antara, and Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan had long been an integral part of Egyptian folklore, and they are still narrated in rural areas. This dramatic folklore, deeply rooted in the Egyptian imagination, thus assured the popularity of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespearean themes bear striking similarities to the subjects of Egyptian folklore. *Romeo and Juliet* (translated as *Martyrs of Love)* resembles the virgin love stories of the Umayyad period (661-750 A.D.), the most famous of which is *Qays and Layla.* Known throughout the Arab world and Asia, this story portrays the virgin love of a young cavalier for his cousin. As in the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet,* this folktale too ends with the death of the lovers. The critic Ruh al-

Khalidi tells of another story set in Tripoli at the end of the nineteenth century :

> (It) is similar to the love of Romeo and Juliet in many ways, especially with respect to the lovers' secret marriage, in which the sheikh acts exactly as Friar Lawrence. The story ends with the death of the lovers. Tears fall when it is narrated, and hearts break when you see the scene (1).

Othello also echoes themes from Egypt's past. Iago, the artful cavalier who craftily strives to benefit himself at the expense of others, moved the Egyptian memory to recall the Mameluke and Ottoman periods, times famous for similarly scheming men who are remembered in folktales. Appropriately, *Othello* was translated as *Tricks of Men.*

In *Hamlet,* the Egyptians saw a mirror reflection of their own legends. The play was readily accepted by their imagination, an imagination already rich in ghosts, spirits, and the revenge of fate. However, they found the unhappy ending difficult ; they could assimilate it only by giving it a function — that is, a moral teaching. Such didactic functions they connected with theater itself.

If we follow Shakespeare we will realize that he is one of the most important writers who attracted the critics. Many studies were written about his plays.

(1) **R h** al-khàli i. Tarikh 'Ilm al-Adab 'Irda al-'Ifrinj wa al-Arab wa **Victor Hugo** (The History of the Study of Literature of the French and theArabs and Victor Hugo), (Cairo, 1904), p. 123.

The first one was written by Farah 'Antùn, who in 1902 discussed the question of authorship of Shakespeare's plays and the social function (2) of the theater. Following that, several essays on Shakespeare and the ever-present question of authorship appeared. Ibràhîm Ramzi in 1916, studied this question. He also analyzed similarities between Shakespeare and the vaudeville plays then performed in Cairo, concluding that Shakespeare's works were more useful to Egyptian society. Proclaiming Shakespeare the creator of romanticism and reality, Ramzi described him as the « father of Zola, the leading nineteenth-century realist, and professor of Hugo, the foremost romanticist in Europe » (3). On April 22, 1916, the Christian newspaper *al-Watan* urged preachers to mention the name of Shakespeare in their sermons and herald him as a hero of the age, one who had helped in forming human society (4).

The most important Shakespearean plays were translated more than once. Within forty-two years after the founding of the Egyptian theater, *Hamlet* was translated three times (first by Tanyus 'Abdu, then by Amîn al-Haddàd and Khalîl Mutràn). In general, these were not honest translations, with the exception of that by Khalîal Mutràn begun in 1921.

Translators took great liberties with Shakespeare's plays. For instance, in *Romeo and Juliet,* the first

(2) **Al-Jami'a,** 3rd year, Vol. VI, January 1902.

(3) Al-'Adab wa al-Tamthil, 1st year, Vol. 11, May 1916.

(4) **Al-Watan,** Vol. 6375, April 22, 1916.

scene was omitted altogether. Other translations were filled with poetry, rhyming prose, and rhetorical figures. The critics did not denounce this changing of Shakespeare ; indeed, they encouraged it ! They did not judge the translation, or the poetry, by how well it kept the spirit of Shakespeare ; rather, they watched how it affected the audience. When the audience was not stirred by the poetry Tanyûs 'Abdu had Hamlet speak, one critic was amazed that « words of this kind pass over the audience without stirring in them admiraion and enthusiasm in a time like this » (5). He felt that 'Abdu's poetry, while ostensibly critical of Hamlet's society, was in actuality critical of Egyptian society itself. He deemed the poetry a worthwhile addition to the play and felt the audience should have admired it. By approving 'Abdu's interjections of his own poetry, the critics gave free rein to haphazard translations.

Slowly, however, honest translations did begin to appear and to be accepted by the critics. The magazine *'Anîs al-Jalîs,* in reviewing, these translations, commented : « This is a better way for the Egyptian to follow the play. It broadens the meaning without fear of disturbing the meaning, because not only the subject but also the spirit of the play is translated » (6). Though the influence of earlier translations continued to hinder good translations until 1923, there is no doubt that some good ones appeared before that time.

(5) 'Anîs, al-Jalîs, November 4, 1906.

(6) 'Anîs al-Jalîs, November 4, 1906.

Despite these early weak translations, Shakespeare remained a powerful figure in Egyptian theater. The first theoretical criticism of Egyptian theater began with an examination of his works. In 1898, 'Amîn al-Rayhàni found fault with Najîb al-Haddàd, the translator of *Romeo and Juliet,* for distorting the play by relating it to himself, thus not remaining true to the original. He spoke of al-Haddàd's omission of several important scenes :

> (He) omits the opening scene involving the fight between the families of Montague and Capulet. This omission made the scenes and the acts apear vague to the audience. It was particularly awkward when Juiiet said to Romeo : « refuse thy name . . . Tis but thy name that is my enemy ». The audience did not understand the meaning of the phrase or why Juliet had said it. The scene in which Capulet threatens his daughter with exile or death if she refuses to marry the Duke was also omitted, leaving the play incomplete (7).

This was the first criticism to deem a translation unacceptable. It was not an artistic analysis of the play, but a criticism of the distortion of the play. Pointing out these distortions was more important than presenting analytical criticism, for it enabled the audience to realize that there were mistakes in what they saw.

Later, al-Rayhàni began to criticize the perfor-

(7) **Al-Thurayya,** 3rd year, Vol 11, September 1, 1898.

mance, particularly the acting. He criticized Salàma Hijàzi one of the founders of Egyptian theater, for his portrayal of Romeo. Al-Rayhàni was very critical of Hijazi's performance, for he disliked a man in his forties playing a character in his teens. He blamed Hijazi for showing no eagerness when he met his lover, « where no power could prevent them from kissing one another » (3). However, al-Rayhàni, a Syrian from New York inexperienced with Egyptian society, did not realize that for Hijàzi to act in such an impetuous manner would have meant the end of his acting career. What happened on the New York stage could not take place in Egyptian theater. Nevertheless, al-Rayhàni remains important, if only for the uniqueness of his disapproval of haphazard translations. Sixteen years after al-Rayhàni's criticism, the same translation was performed, and critics were then concerned only about the acting.

Unlike *Romeo and Juliet,* which was most favorably accepted by audiences but inspired little critical writing, *Hamlet* was truly stimulating for audiences and critics alike. The critics were astonished by the splendor of this tragedy. However, they did not explore the character of Hamlet — his feelings of opposition and the anxiety in which he lived. They avoided the problems created by Hamlet's character, just as they avoided explanations of the plot or of the dramatic structure. They evaded discussions of Hamlet's passions, of his

(8) Ibid.

sick attitude toward society, as well as of his feelings for his parents, his uncle, and his lover. They did not explore those passions which together create the dramatic tempo of the play. Yet, though they did not understand the tumult in Hamlet's psyche, they vaguely felt its beauty. This vague feeling was the starting point for exploring the secret of this work.

'Idwàr Marqus' criticism of *Hamlet, though* devoid of profound analysis, did show an understanding of the play. He saw that one could « enlighten the mind, make the heart alive, soften the passions, and gain wisdom through it » (9). He described the play as having « excellent disconcerting scenes almost constantly from beginning to end » (10). He tried to express the conflict in the play, but as a result of the newness of Egyptian theater, there was no Arabic theatrical term to express the word « conflict ». Marqus sided with some European scholars when he criticized « the appearance of Hamlet's father after his death and his ability to speak » (11). He commented that the scene « was strange and alien to the law of nature ; and what is strange and alien to the low of nature, the mind refuses » (12). Although he formed his judgments from his own personal tastes, his writings show some expertise in theater.

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(9) « Hamlet, » al-Jawà'ib, Vol. 865, August 10, 1908.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid.

In an article written in 1913, 'Abd al-Halîm Dilàwar began to analyze the passion and anxiety of Hamlet ; « Though Hamlet was great, he remained one of us, because he was in a strange, yet real, situation. He was not you or me, but he was both of us » (13). However, Dilàwar continued his critique by comparing Hamlet with other tragic characters, especially with Yaguro in *The Japanese Honor*. In his judgment, *The Japanese Honor,* with its cohesion and clarity, stands above *Hamlet*. By placing Yaguro above Hamlet, Dilawàr demonstrated the immaturity of his analysis of Shakespeare.

Dilàwar praised the author of *The Japanese Honor,* who « followed the rules of aesthetics and the traditions of writing enabling him to conclude his play and satisfy both the elite and the common » (14). On the other hand he underrated Shakespeare, whom he described as following no rules except his own : « at times the action flows with no apparent focus, and at other times it is unaccountably given more facus. His tragedies contain sections in need of clarification, but it is never given. » (15) He credited the appeal of *The Japanese Honor* to its technique of following one dramatic line — — the protection of honor-from which all action de-

(13) « Al-Tamthil wa al-ta'lif » (Acting and Writing), al-Jarîda, Vol. 1852,Aprii 14, 1913.

(14) Al-Jarîda, Vol. 2166, April 14, 1914.

(15) Al-Jarîda, Vol. 2166, April 14, 1914.

veloped. He conceived of this continuity as creating a clear and direct path to the Egyptian's emotions and satisfying both the elite and the common. Yaguro was smooth and lucid ; Hamlet was stormy and puzzling. The Egyptian of 1914 was struggling with World War I and the depression. He was not in need of stimulus for his mind ; rather, he was in need of stimulus for his emotions. Therefore, *The Japanese Honor,* a completely romantic play, appealed to the romantic Egyptian.

The Japanese Honor, with its predictable ending, resembled an Arabic folktale. It was that resemblance that the Egyptians tried to impose on Shakespeare. They attempted to change his style by omitting several scenes, but the power of Shakespeare obliged them to retain the complete thearical action. They could not transform the essence of the play. And, however much they criticized him, none denied his superiority, a superiority that broke through the most distorted translations.

Around 1912, the translators of Shakespeare began to adhere to his text. It appeared that they had completely accepted Shakespeare. At the 1918 performance of *Hamlet,* the critics praised the play. Nevertheless, they still avoided a profound analysis of the text. Their attention now turning to the acting, they were quick to censure any weakness in the performances. They demanded of the actors that they portray Hamlet as Hamlet, without adding or detracting from the play. Hasan Salama, one of the critics, felt that the stage

Hamlet was not the true or expected Hamlet (16).

In discussing the character of Hamlet, Muhammed Hamed al-Sa'îdi observed that :

> (Shakespeare,) in his tragedy, drew the picture of a decent young man, one with morals and a strong imagination. He is frank and stands against artificiality and hypocrisy. He is full of fear, even of the trivial. He is clever, thoughtful, sensitive, and passionate. The pain burning in his heart could be easily touched. Shakespeare decorated this image as his sharp mind and floating imagination allowed. We see, in the image of Hamlet, many different psychological aspect : we see the victim of melancholy and misery, one full of doubt, despair, and sarcasm ; we see a hesitant young man, almost helpless, as if led by hidden powers (17).

That al-Saîdi admired Shakespeare is clear. But his analysis only touches the surface ; it does not examine the text. His description of Hamlet could fit any young character in any tragedy — Orestes in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, Orestes in *The Flies* of Sartre, or Yaguro in *The Japanese Honor*. Nevertheless, al-Sa'îdi should not be castigated for his shallow critique, which was, after all, in the style of that period : A criticism was to contain a judgement given in short phrases with no analytical detail. The rationale was not to be included. A

(16) «Hamlet» al-Minbar, Vol. 1400, November 19, 1918.

(17) « Hamlet, » al-Minbar. Vol. 1402, December 22, 1918.

reason or interpretation would have been difficult; voicing personal tastes was easier.

The only point which al-Sa'idi scrutinized was the acting, especially that of George Abyad. He criticized Abyad for not understanding « that Shakespeare would not force the wisdom from the lips of Hamlet as though he were an orator. A wise man delivers his wisdom from within. Hamlet is a young man with a pure and philosophical soul. Wisdom flows naturally from his lips as tears from the eyes » (18). Although al-Sa'idi criticized Abyad's performance, his admiration for the play still remained. But he admired its dramatic value not because he had a scholarly understanding of Shakespeare, but because he perceived Shakespeare's natural link Egyptian psychology and culture.

The Egyptian's understanding of Shakespeare sprang from his personal feelings and tastes. It was in this way he perceived its meaning. This superficial understanding of Shakespeare held true for plays other than *Hamlet,* such as *Othello.* To the Egyptian, Othello was the symbol of jealousy, (19) and many questioned the social value of this play (20).

There was no progressive movement toward a scholarly study of Shakespeare until the College of Art established its English department. It was here that

(18) « Hamlet, » al-Minbar, Vol. 1402, December 22, 1918.

(19) Al-Raqib, Vol. 20, April 2, 1912.

(20) « Othello, » al-Jarida, Vol. 1668, September 3, 1912.

the study of Western drama began. From 1927, articles about Shakespeare regularly appeared ; however, they were completely Western in their approach. Then in the 1950's 'Abbàs Mahmùd al-'Aqqàd produced one of the major works on Shakespeare in Arabic. This was the first time an Egyptian put forth a clear and original appraisal of Shakespeare.

Today Shakespeare occupies a prominent position in Egyptian theater. All his works were translated, in a government program for the translation of Shakespeare, by eminent writers who have an excellent position in Arabic literature and whose knowledge of English is beyond doubt, since most of them were educated in the west or were oriented in Western culture. The hope of every actor is to perform in Shakespeare's plays ; the goal of every director is to find a new way of directing his works ; and the Egyptian scholar of theater must first study Shakespeare to begin his career. The very few critics who find fault with Shakespeare by questioning the social commitment of his art in reality understand neither Shakespeare nor the very essence of the social function of art itself.

However, the attitude toward Shakespeare goes beyond admiration. Shakespeare has been an important factor in the emergence of poetic plays. In his attempt to create Arabic theatrical poetry, 'Ahmad Shawqi turned to Shakespeare. Even though Shawqi was oriented to French culture, it was not strange that he would turn to Shakespeare, for French literature held Shakespeare in high esteem.

In 1926 Shawqi wrote his first poetic play, *Majnùn Layla* (The Crazy for Layla), followed by *the death of Cleopatra* and several other plays. Even though the subject of *Majnun Layla* was inspired by love narratives from Arabic folklore, Shawqi was no doubt also inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare not only inspired Shawqi but also provided the model for his play by the same name, *Antonio and Cleopatra*. This play became a subject of comparative study for Arabic scholars. Shawqi wanted to have in the Arabic language the same position Shakespeare had in the English language. But Shawqi was imprisoned in the Arabic poetic tradition and was unable to break its chains. Thus his talent appeared more strongly than did his dramatic power.

Another poet, 'Azîz 'Abàza, tried in the forties to imitate Shakespeare, but he followed Shawqi in drawing his first play, *Qays and Lubna,* another love story, from Arabic folk narratives. He further tried to parallel Shawqi's *the death of Cleopatra* by writing a play in imitation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. He could not, however, reach Shawqi, and of course he was unable to reach Shakespeare. The lyrics of his play were strong, but other than that they had no life.

Sa'îd 'Agl in Lebanon also tried to imitate Shakespeare's poetry in a play called *Cadmus,* but his attempt was to no avail. In the forties Bakthîr also joined the field of imitators by trying to imitate Shakespeare's theatrical poetry. Bakthîr's attempt was unsuc-

cessful, not because of Arabic poetry but because of his own poetic skill.

These attempts to imitate Shakespeare led to the bold judgment that Arabic poetry is inadequate for dramatic expression, but those critics who so judged or who accepted that judgement did not understand that Arabic poetry was newly exposed to the demands of theatrical poetry. In order to do that kind of poetry skillfully, it needed a lot more experience. After all, Shakespeare himself did not emerge from nothing; there was a tradition behind him, and since Shakespeare, how many have equalled him in writing universal drama ? Even though this judgment was discouraging, poets in the fifties were still working hard to create poetic theater.

This new attempt had more success than the ones before it, for writers had learned from the failure of others, and they also benefited from the new movement in Arabic poetry, which was a rebellion against the Arabic ode. This new movement tried to find a new form and subject for a new expression in Arabic poetry. The most important result of this revolt was free verse, which opened a new poetic world.

The most important leaders of this movement who entered the theatrical world were 'Abd al Rahmàn al-Sharqawi and Salah 'Abd al-Sabùr. Their experience with free verse enabled them to have some success in poetic theater. 'Abd al Rahmàn al-Sharqawi's first poetic play, *Ma'sàt Jamīla* (1959), is about an Algerian

girl fighting the French. It is the kind of play where history gets mixed with contemporary issues. The Algerian revolution thus provided him with a ready-made subject which he tried to express with poetry. Then he wrote another play *al-Fata Muhràn* (The Young Muhràn), which is more developed than his previous play.

Though his plays are considered more developed than many earlier ones, he was criticized for his lyrical poetry. Similarly, Salah 'Abd al-Sabùr in his two plays, Ma'sàt al-Hallàj (The Tragedy of Hallaj, 1966) and *Layla wa al-majnùn* (Layla and the Crazy, 1970), was also lyrical, even more so than al-Sharqàwi. However, Salah used contemporary historical subjects carrying traditional folk themes. He was thus more successful in affecting his audience by his lyrical poetry than was al-Sharqàwi, probably because the subjects were closer to the audience's own painful problems and were also suitable for singing. He was criticized for that, but the critics ignored the fact that both playwrights were trying to imitate Shakespeare, even his lyrical power. But neither could achieve the harmony between the lyric and the dramatic that Shakespeare had.

The attempts to write poetic plays have not ceased using Shakespeare as a model, though poetic theater has no voice in the universal dramatic world today. Our poets in their theatrical writing are not looking to the world or to Shakespeare to imitate and follow. Their hope is instead to reach his level and to do with their own language what Shakespeare did with his.

CONCLUSION

The goal I want to reach is to point out that theater in Islamic countries emerged from two influences : first, the Islamic and folk culture ; second, the Western culture. Islamic civilization already knew some forms of theatrical expression ; therefore, when Western theater was introduced to them, they accepted it without any reluctance, and it soon became one of their most creative literary arts. Thus, if theater should become alienated from Islamic culture, it would not find a place in any Islamic country.

There is no doubt that theater as an Islamic art has not yet reached its height of development. This fact is due to the influence of folklore, which has played two roles. It has provided support through the audience. the themes, and the actors, and at the same time it has drawn theater toward the characteristics of its artistic expressions known a long time ago : narration and song. This answers the question of why the playwrights narrate and the poets who write for theater sing. In

order to reach its highest development, the theater must stop depending on narration and song, or it must find a new way of using these techniques. This subject is the most difficult to research about theater in the Arab and Islamic world, but it is a problem which I will try to solve in my next book.

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